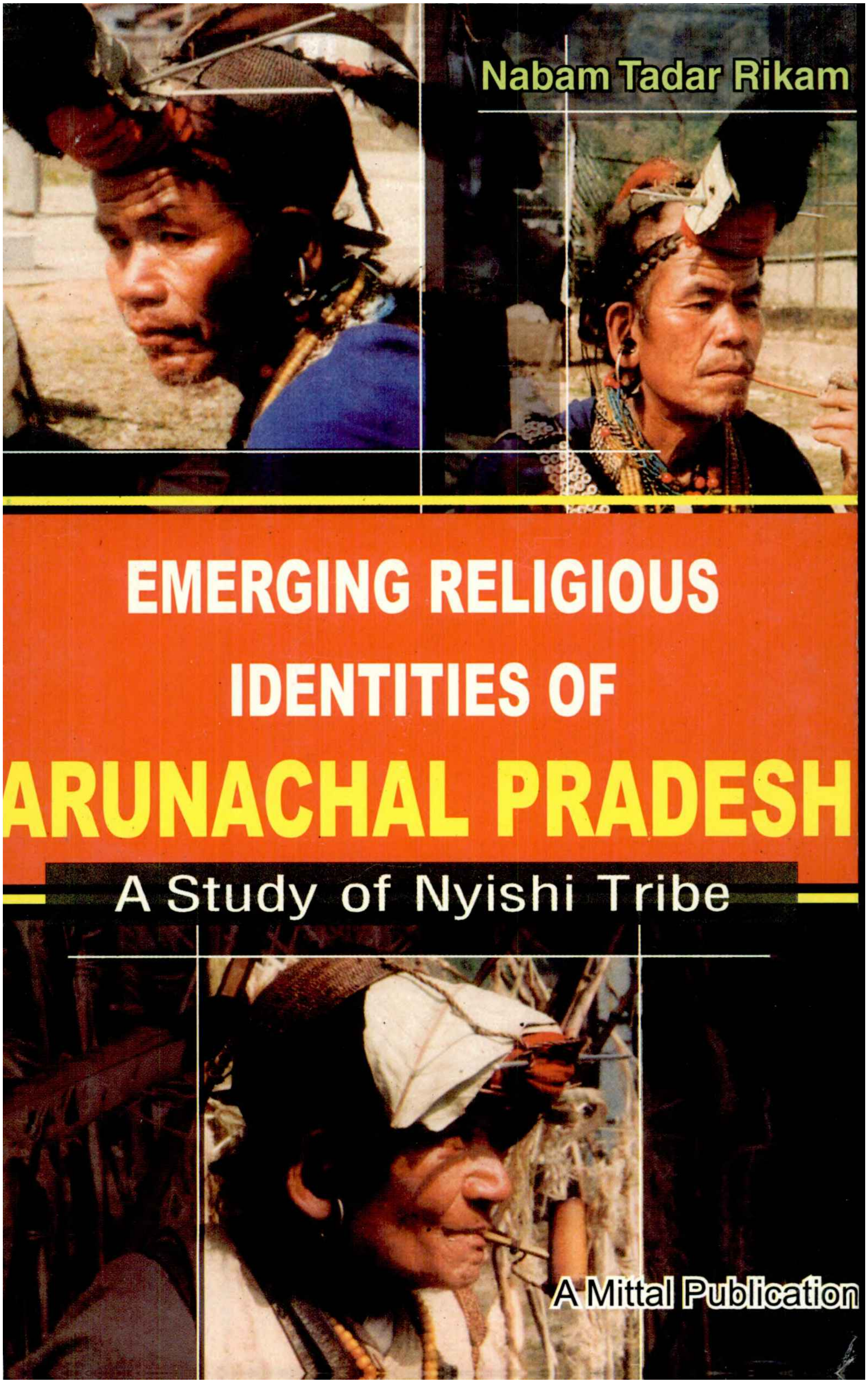

Nabam Tadar Rikam

EMERGING RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

A Study of Nyishi Tribe

A Mittal Publication

This book deals with emerging religious identities and transformations taking place for the last five decades in Arunachal Pradesh with specific research on the Nyishi tribe. Ethno-historic method has been followed to capture the imagination and process of changes in the society. A factual narrative with condensed interpretations have been mutually embedded in a lucid and comprehensive manner. The book is first of its kind and covers exhaustively the entire gamut of the subject. Apart from its importance and utility in the world of academics, it will also benefit the common readers and researchers.

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EMERGING RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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THE AUTHOR

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—A Study of Nyishi Tribe

Nabam Tadar Rikam

MITTAL PUBLICATIONS
NEW DELHI (INDIA)

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First Published 2005
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ISBN 81-8324-032-1

Showroom:

4594/9, Daryaganj,
New Delhi-110002
Phone: 23250398

Published and printed by Krishan Mittal for Mittal Publications,
A-110, Mohan Garden, New Delhi-110059, India.
Tel.: 25351493, 25351976 *Telefax:* 91-11-25351521
E-Mail : mittalp@ndf.vsnl.net.in *Gram* : Mittalbux
website : www.mittalpublications.com

Dedicated
in
Cherished Memory of
(Late) Nabam Tarang and
(Late) Gollo Khoda

DR. A. C. BHAGABATI
Honorary Co-ordinator

Field Station for North East India
**INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE
FOR THE ARTS**

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FOREWORD

This book is the outcome of the author's passionate commitment to research in the arena of social change that is coming about right now in the North-East Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. He has dealt with a topic, namely, 'Emerging Religious Identities of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of Nyishi Tribe', which is not merely contemporary but also important in understanding the character and tenor of emergent social order in the region as a whole.

Dr. Rikam's work, in the broad domain of modern intellectual history can lay claim to be a contribution to the social anthropology of the region. Apart from the use of conventional methods of historiography, he has also made liberal use of anthropological methodology of data collection and analysis. This is appropriate in a situation like Arunachal Pradesh where written, archival sources of history are sparse. His study of changes coming about in the sphere of religion in a time-frame as recent as the post-independence period would have been difficult to capture without adopting an inter-disciplinary approach. In the context of any Arunachalese community, change in the sphere of faith, an essentially post-independence development in most cases, has far-reaching consequences in other spheres of life.

Dr. Rikam's book focuses on a single social formation, a tribal community called Nyishi, distributed through the west-central part of Arunachal Pradesh covering as many as five of the sixteen districts. The Nyishi is one of the largest tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

The book, to my mind, is a clear and lucid exposition of how the new religion, Christianity, through organized churches have impinged on local tribal life over the past few decades despite fairly strong resistance on the part of the administration as well as sections of local communities. The economic and educational benefits accruing from conversion and even 'faith healing' qualities attributed to the new religion aided its spread. The researcher quite tellingly portrays, with examples and interview narratives, how in the beginning the people were little concerned with the actualities of the new faith. Their prime and immediate concern was to give up the rituals and sacrifices, mandatory in the traditional faith that involved huge expenditure. Christianity made these customary practices irrelevant.

Dr. Rikam also provides extremely interesting material on the current status of indigenous faith movement, which gained momentum in the community as a reaction to the introduced religion.

All in all, the book is a very balance account. It is able to maintain a high standard of objectivity, considering the emotive nature of the subject of his research. I feel that no one interested in the social and cultural development of Arunachal Pradesh can ignore this book. Dr. Rikam has done a commendable job. I leave it to the readers to explore for themselves the qualities of the book.

A.C. BHAGABATI

PREFACE

Modernity and modern values have ushered tremendous changes in contemporary human civilization. It has particularly put the tribal people at the crossroad as their harmonious relationship with the nature; their socio-cultural, political and religious institutions compatible with age-old traditions have been passing through a stage of transition. Religion as an institution has been an important aspect of the society. It is well knitted with other elements of the human society. This is why in the events of any changes in the society it also certainly affects or even alters the religious belief system of the people.

This book is a slightly modified and improved form of my Ph.D. thesis. The main objective of bringing the thesis in book form is to make it widely and easily available to the people who aspire to pursue their studies on the areas dealt with. Arunachal Pradesh, an abode of numerous ethnic groups was little known to the outside world till recently. However, the Arunachalee tribes including the Nyishi have been experiencing a new reality of life culminating into the series of changes in response to new opportunities with wider market economy, flow of new world views and tremendous avenues. The resultant nature of this transition has compelled the people to cast aside many of their customs, traditions, faiths and practices that have incorporated new elements within the emerging socio-cultural matrix. Under the influence of these changes new social groups have emerged in the society. These segmentations could be based on social, political, economic and religious aspects of the society.

A sense of skepticism emerged especially among the young generations and so-called educated class about the old faiths, beliefs and practices. According to them, many of the components and the processes involved in the traditional belief systems and practices are based on superstition. That is why these are not viable in this modern world. In addition to this perception, Christianity, a new religion has come and it has greatly influenced the people. The adherents of new religion openly denounced the rituals and sacrifices involved in traditional belief systems and practices. It has necessarily set a new outlook among the people evolving a kind of separate identity based on Christianity.

On the other hand, there is a feeling among some sections of the society to revive and reform the traditional religious practices so as to make them acceptable for the people in this changed scenario and also to counter the onslaught of the new religion. In fact, if we objectively study the indigenous faiths and practices, there are so many elements, which are worth knowing, preserving and promoting. Now this group has initiated some measures on that line by forming religious forums like Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Culture Society (NIFCS) and Nyedar Namlo. Today for all practical purposes Nyishi community is polarized into the adherents of Indigenous religion on the one hand and those of Christianity on the other.

Though, a large number of scholars working on the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have focused their attention on social changes taking place but hardly any research work has been devoted exclusively to religious changes. Till date the scholars both native as well as non-native have discussed only the traditional religious institutions. The changing scenario in this regard has been either skipped or perfunctorily discussed.

In this book, a modest attempt has been made to examine the process of religious transformation among the people of Arunachal Pradesh. Emphasis has been put on the emerging religious identities of the Nyishis since the dawn of independence. It is a factual narrative and the interpretation is in-telling without prejudice. The work of this nature will certainly help to open up new vistas of intellectual discourse in the light of the emerging facts and figures. This, in turn may also help the decision makers to evolve and initiate better policy frame for the people of Arunachal Pradesh in general and for the Nyishis in particular.

NABAM TADAR RIKAM

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is an uphill task to recall the names of all those who helped and assisted me in the production of this book. Some are likely to be missed. However those individuals and institutions that readily come to my mind are acknowledged below:

Professor Jagdish Lal Dawar, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences & Head of the Department of History and Ethnology, Mizoram University, Aizawl, has been my friend, philosopher and guide. He opened up new spheres of research and enquiry at every point of his critical comments and queries. I am deeply indebted to him for meeting all my demands – academic as well as existential for the last ten years of my association with him. Professor A.C. Bhagabati, an eminent Anthropologist and former Vice-Chancellor of Arunachal University, deserves my sincere thanks and gratitude for painstakingly writing a compact, significant and superb foreword for my book.

My thanks are due to the authorities and the staff of National Archives, Teen Murti Library and Jawaharlal Nehru University Library of New Delhi for their valuable help and cooperation extended to me during my stay at New Delhi.

My deep sense of appreciation and thanks also go to the staff of the various government departments and institutions of Arunachal Pradesh such as General Administration, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Directorate of Higher Education and School Education, Directorate of Research, Directorate of Information and Public Relation and also to the staff of Deputy Commissioners' offices of Ziro, Daporijo, Seppa and Yupia for their kind cooperation extended to me during my work. I sincerely extend my gratitude to the Librarian and the Library staff of the State Library, Nehru Museum Library & State Archives, Itanagar, Arunachal University Library, Doimukh, and Dera Natung Government College Library, Itanagar for their patient and untiring help offered throughout my research.

I am indebted to my esteemed colleagues and friends - Dr. Sarit K. Chaudhuri, Dr. M. Q. Khan, Dr. H. K. Sinha, Dr. Ashan Riddi, Toko Hinda, Johnney Techi, Tana Showren, Gollo Tatang, Ngurang Takap, Changha Chipo and Nera Techi, who inspired and helped me throughout the entire period of my work. Their constructive criticism and valuable suggestion enabled me to further enrich my work.

I record my special gratitude to the members and activists of different NGOs including Nyishi Elite Society, All Nyishi Students' Union, Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society, Nyedar Namlo, Arunachal Pradesh Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society and Nyishi Baptist Church Council for their valuable cooperation. My sincere thanks are also due to all those venerable from different walks of life including the village elders, the village heads, traditional priests, religious leaders, social activists, intellectuals, politicians and even common men for their spontaneous and untiring response during the interaction.

Finally, I have the pleasure of acknowledging the deep indebtedness to my loving wife Kamnee, who despite being a working lady shouldered the entire domestic responsibility single handedly besides taking all care of our children Takam, Talam and Yeyam.

Itanagar
Spring, 2005

NABAM TADAR RIKAM

ABBREVIATIONS

AAPSU	All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union.
ABSU	All Bodo Students' Union.
ANYA	All Nyishi Youth Association.
ANSU	All Nyishi Students' Union.
APNWA	Arunachal Pradesh Nyobu Welfare Association.
AVP	Arunachal Vikash Parishad/Akhil Vikash Parishad.
BDS	Bodo Sahitya Sabha.
DPM	Donyi Polo Mission.
DPYK	Donyi Polo Yelam Kebang.
EAC	Extra Assistant Commissioner.
IFCSAP	Indigenous Faith and Culture Society of Arunachal Pradesh.
JACRAC	Joint Action Committee for Restoration of Raga Administrative Centre.
JNC	Jawaharlal Nehru College.
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University.
MP	Member of Parliament.
NEFA	North East Frontier Agency.
NES	Nyishi Elite Society.
NIFCS	Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Cluture Society.
NBCC	Nyishi Baptist Church Council.
RKM	Ramakrishna Mission.
SDSU	Subansiri District Student's Union/Sub-Division Students' Union.

ULFA	:	United Liberation Front of Assam.
VKA	:	Vivekanada Arunyoti.
VKV	:	Vivekanada Kendra Vidhyalaya.
ZPM	:	Zilla Parishad Member.

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1

INTRODUCTION

I

Arunachal Pradesh: Land and People

Situated in the extreme northeastern part of India, Arunachal Pradesh is one of the unique pieces of land on this earth. The first ray of the sun peeps at this land. This is the reason, Arunachal is popularly known as the land of rising sun. It is located at the latitude of 26° 28' N and 29° 30' N and longitude of 91° 30' E and 97° 30' E.[1] It is a sentinel of the country bordering as many as three neighbouring countries viz. China, Myanmar and Bhutan besides Tibet, an autonomous council. Dong, located in Anjaw district of the state, shot into limelight in the world for being the first place to receive the sun ray in this millennium. Arunachal Pradesh has a total of 83,743 sq.km[2] landmass, of which more than 80% are hilly regions that sustain the forest resources. There are as many as 110 major and minor tribes that inhabit in the state. Arunachalees, basically belong to Paleo-Mongoloid stock and mostly speak the Tibeto-Burmese group of languages. As per the 2001 census, the population of Arunachal Pradesh is 1091117. The density of population is 13 persons per square Km.[3]

Table 1.1: Population of Arunachal Pradesh from 1961 to 2001

Census Year	*Total*	*Density*	*Schedule Tribe*
1961	336558	4	298436
1971	467511	6	369408
1981	631839	8	441167
1991	864558	10	550351
2001	1091117	13	694606

[*Source*: Census of India, (Arunachal Pradesh) 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001]

The land is an abode of over five hundred rare orchids, which are incomparable throughout the world. The natural vegetations, flora and fauna add extra charm and beauty to this hidden paradise. Several authors and scholarly visitors have appreciated and praised the enchanting scenic beauty of Arunachal Pradesh in distinctive descriptions. Verrier Elwin very aptly describes this feature in the following words: 'the beauty of the countryside - the distant mountains white with snow, the nearer hills dressed in pine, oak and fir, the limpid green of winding rivers - has created in them a love of beauty, a sensitive taste and a desire to make good things.'[4] Sachin Roy, who worked on the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh writes, 'Man and nature have stayed here for centuries facing each other, entrenched in their positions, making occasional forays into each other's dominions. But struggle has been harder for man.'[5]

Traditionally, the people of Arunachal Pradesh may be broadly divided into two groups on the basis of ethnicity and religion i.e. the Bodic and the non-Bodic. Those tribes who profess Buddhism of either sect - Hinayana or Mahayana and have migrated from Myanmar and Bhutan comes under Bodic group while those group of tribes who profess and maintain different but distinct types of indigenous faiths come under non-Bodic group. Among non-Bodic group, the Tani group of tribes, which includes Adi, Nyishi, Apatani, Tagin, Miri or Mishing who claims to be migrated from the north, is numerically larger than the other groups and sub-groups in the state. They worship Donyi Polo as their indigenous religion. But now many Arunachalees especially from the Nyishi tribe and the Adi tribe have converted to Christianity.

II

Administrative Growth and Development

The administrative growth of Arunachal Pradesh has been precisely started after the British occupation of Assam in 1826 A.D. Initially, the British continued the appeasement policy of Ahoms towards the frontier tribes. However, by the end of 1850, British modified their policies, which were essentially called 'non-interference.'[6] The passing of 'Inner Line Regulation 1873' and its subsequent promulgation in Lakhimpur and Darrang in September 1875 and March 1876 was basically an extension of the policy of non-interference.[7] With the appointment of Captain F. Needham as Assistant Political Officer at Sadiya in 1882, the fragile type of frontier administration was given to a virtual shape. As a result of development in Lhasa, in

August 1910, Chinese activities on the frontier and murder of Noel Williamson, Assistant Political Officer in March 1911 at the hands of Abors (now Adis), British policy of 'non-interference' was replaced by a policy of 'loose political control.'[8]

The definition of Indo-Tibetan boundary in 1914, popularly known as 'Mac Mohan Line'[9] was the most important step initiated by the British. The 'Government of India Act of 1919', designated all the tribal areas of Assam as 'backward tracts', which was rechristened to 'Excluded Areas' and 'Partially Excluded Areas' in 1935. Consequently, the Balipara, Sadiya and Lakhimpur Frontiers of NEFA were designated as 'Excluded Areas.' In 1942, the Tirap Frontier Tract was carved out of the Sadya Frontier Tract, while in 1946 the Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into two divisions - the Abor Hills and the Mishmi Hills. At the dawn of independence, there were five administrative frontiers but they had undergone a series of territorial and jurisdictional readjustments. In 1954, the Frontier Divisions were given the names i.e. Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit, Tirap and Tuensang, but at the end of 1957, Tuensang was re-united with the Naga Hills District as the new Naga Hills and Tuensang Area.[10]

However, the promulgation of the 'North-East Frontier (Administration) Regulation 1954', paved the way for full scale administration for the entire area under the collective designation of 'North-East Frontier Agency - NEFA. A 'Single Line Administration' system was introduced which greatly increased the efficiency of work and the spirit of co-operation among the officers.[11] The Ministry of Home Affairs took over the administrative responsibility of NEFA from the Ministry of External Affairs in 1965.[12] Consequent upon the passage of 'North Eastern Area (Reorganization) Act 1971', NEFA was converted into a Union Territory status.[13] In next year the name was again rechristened to Arunachal Pradesh and the administrative divisions were also renamed from Divisions to Districts. A four tier Panchayati Raj introduced in 1969 was replaced by Pradesh Council in 1972. In 1975, the Pradesh Council under the administrative head of Chief Commissioner was upgraded to Provincial Assembly with Council of Ministers headed by Chief Minister and the status of Chief Commissioner was also promoted to Lt. Governor. The first General election to elect thirty Members Legislative Assembly (MLA) was held in 1978. Within a decade, Arunachal Pradesh attained her Statehood on 20th February 1987. The strength of the Member of Legislative Assembly was raised to sixty and with a continuous bifurcation of districts, now the number has been increased to sixteen.

III

The Nyishis

The present study is based on Nyishi tribe, which is one of the major tribes of the state. They are inhabited in five different districts namely Upper Subansiri, Lower Subansiri, Kurung Kume, Papum Pare and East Kameng. These districts are named after the major rivers i.e. Subansiri, Kurung & Kume, Papum & Pare and Kameng respectively. A few Nyishis are also inhabited in Sonitpur and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. The five districts are located in the central and western part of the state which falls under the North Eastward Himalayan Range. Besides the above major rivers, there are numerous minor rivers and streams that either originated from or flow through these districts. The rivers are turbulent and flow with full force during the rainy season and, as such these are not navigable.

The region is surrounded by Tibet and China in the north, Assam in the south, West Siang district in the east and West Kameng district in the west. Its abundant natural vegetations largely influence the climate. But with the rapid deforestation and urbanization, the variations in the climatic conditions are visible as unlike the olden times now we have both hot and humid climate in the foothills while the up hills or interiors experience extreme cold particularly during the winter-months. During monsoon, rainfall is heavy in the valleys and southern part of the region. The average annual rainfall is 250 cm. approximately. Soil erosion and landslide are common features of the region, leading sometimes to flood causing thereby damage to roads, bridges, agricultural field, and crops, thus endangering the human lives, domestic animals and other properties.

The area is gifted with abundance of flora and fauna. The natural vegetations are varied in nature with the elevations of the region, which shelters numerous kinds of creatures. Among the tree species khukar hollock, oak, jetali, amari, simul, pine, walnut, hill chompa, wild banana, wild palm etc. are commonly found. Numerous shrub varieties like creepers, elephant grass, maidenhairs, spear grass, wild berry, dye-creeper, lady-fern etc. grow in plenty. Canes and bamboos of various types grow in abundance and they have great role in the socio-economic life of the people. Among the wild animals that maintain the ecological balance of the nature are tiger, leopard, lion, wild cat, golden cat, jackal, elephant, deer, wild boar, wild buffalo, monkey, porcupine, squirrel, rat etc. and snakes of different types are making their abode in the forest. The birds of varied kinds such as snake bird, little green baron, cattle egret, night heron, spotbil duck, sparrow, hawk, eagle, vulture, cuckoo dove, owl, crow, wood pecker, bulbul, horn bill etc. are making their habitat in the vast and dense ever green forest of this region.

Historically, culturally and even in terms of language the Nyishis have a close affinity with the neighbouring tribes such as Adis, Apatanis, Tagins, and the Miris or Mishings of adjoining Assam. Like these tribes, the Nyishis also do believe that they are the descendants of Abo Tani (mythical forefathers). That is why all these tribes are called the 'Tani Group of Tribes' in Arunachal Pradesh. The Nyishi tribes including the Tagin and the Hill Miri (many have assert themselves as Nyishis) have been mistakenly or without justification termed as Dafla or Dumpla by Ahoms. Later on, the colonial ethnographers continued to use the same nomenclature and were carried even in the constitution of the independent India.

Few ethnographers and authors tried to describe the Nyishi (Earlier known as Dafla) in their own ways in totality vis-à-vis the other tribes of the state. They had painted wrong picture of the tribe by studying only a few pockets of the Nyishis and subsequent authors have repeatedly used the same notion. Thus, F. Hamilton, described the Daflas as retaining 'the fierce and warlike spirit of the ancient Assamese; they indulge their appetites in eating unclean food as much as the impure nations of China and Europe, and adhere to their old customs, altogether rejecting the instruction of the sacred order of the Hindus and what is called the purity of its law.'[14] Similarly, in his book, *The Daflas of the Subansiri Region*, B.K. Shukla described, 'despite these physical variations; however, all the Daflas are well built, muscular and handsome. The maidens are attractive with their simple and innocent looks and the children with their rosy cheeks are particularly pretty.'[15] But Mr. Shukla, on the other hand distracted the truth relating to the temperamental behavour of the Nyishis. This distortion is explicit in his words: "Their hills have remained terra incognita for centuries, with a long history of acts of brutal vengeance, raids and ransom, assault and murders. 'Innocent adventurers and intruders were liable to be ambushed and killed."[16]

The myths and legends establish beyond doubt that the Nyishis and for that matter the entire human race descended from the same ancestor i.e. *Atu Nyia Tani*. The people call themselves *Nyeshang, Nishi* or more appropriately as *Nyishi* since the time immemorial. As per their mythology, the term '*Nyishi*' or '*Nyeshang*' is derived from two words i.e. *Nyi* or *Nyia* - means man or human race that descended from *Atu Nyia* (first real man on earth) and *Eshang* or *Ishi* - means high hills or highland. Therefore, a compound word '*Nyishi*' denotes the descendants of *Atu Nyia* who dwells in the highland. This is the reason they are called highlanders. Nyishis, by nature are conscientious, confident, sturdy, brave, courageous, industrious, simple and straightforward. However, due to the variations of topographical and climatical conditions, their physical stature, dress, phonetic accent of language etc. vary slightly from one region to other. But because of the same racial blood, more or less their temperament, attitude and mentality are almost similar. In the words of Haimendorf:

> *The Daflas are less homogeneous than many other hill tribes in that part. They are distinguished by two pronounced and divergent types. The more frequent type is made up of those having round, flat face with a broad snub-nose, prominent cheekbones, eyes lying in the flat sockets, and other type is characterized by an oblong face, a prominent often hooked nose with a narrow bridge, deepest eyes, a well-pronounced chin, ruddy complexion, comparatively high stature and athletic build.*[17]

In absence of standard historical documentation and lack of archaeological sources, there is no definite idea about the origin, evolution and pattern of migration of the Nyishis. In this way, the early history of Nyishi is shrouded in the midst of wilderness.[18] Nevertheless, they have rich culture, glorious tradition and fascinating religious faith, which have been vigorously professed and maintained through ethical codes, orally and believed to have been handed down from generation to generation since the time immemorial. The social and cultural ethos is elaborately represented in their *Idh-bingnam, Buya-sonam, Rukhpi-sonam, Nyeme-Kabnam, Bingjam-jamnam, Baghe-panam, Darkumba-damam, Nargubo-namam* and so on and so forth.

In the beginning, the Ahom rulers in Assam had only occasional contact with this tribe. The Ahom Buranji made the first mention of Daflas (Nyishis) in 1562 when they became allies of the Kochs in their invasion of Assam. The Nyishis were divided into western Daflas and eastern Daflas. The Nyishis used to descend down with their hill product in the foothills once or twice in a year to exchange or collect their essentials from the plain dwellers of certain adjoining areas. This kind of relationship sometimes turned to sour and that led to clashes between the Nyishis and the plain people. The Buranjis had referred to several Ahom expeditions into the Nyishi (Dafla) country.[19] The first conflict was directed against the western Nyishis in 1614, where the Ahoms were badly defeated with heavy loss of men and provisions. Subsequently, the Nyishis unleashed a reign of lawlessness in the foothills and that is why they are recorded as the most turbulent and formidable tribe that the Ahoms had encountered. To check and avert the raids and plunders of the Nyishi, the Ahom king Pratap Singha (1603-41) constructed a huge fort call *Dafla Garh* in the Darrang district which is also popularly known as *Raj Garh* (Royal Fortification). Throughout the Ahom period in Assam, the ruler's main concern was to contain the frontier tribes in their hills and forest as they used to disturb peace in the foothills. They adopted a policy of conciliation followed by cautious use of force in extreme case.

The Nyishis were so turbulent that once, the Prime Minister of Raja Udayaditya Singha, while cautioning the king, declared that, 'the Dafla miscreants can be captured only if an elephant can enter into a rat hole.'[20] But Raja ignored his warning and ultimately the expedition received crushing defeat from the hands of Nyishi. Muhammad Kazim, in the days of Aurangzeb wrote, 'The Daflas are entirely independent of the Ahom Raja, and plunder the country contiguous to their mountains.'[21] One of the earliest specific references to the tribe occurred in the account written by Shihabuddin Talis who accompanied Mirjumla when the latter invaded Assam in 1662 A.D. He wrote, 'the Dafla tribe did not place its feet in the skirt of obedience to the Ahom Raja, but occasionally encroached on his kingdom.'[22] In order to buy peace in the foothills, the Ahom king, Pratap Singha formally granted a Posa right to the Nyishis and a few hill tribes. In fact, the Posa, which was hitherto collected illegally by the hill tribes, was regularized with a condition that they shall show allegiance and pay tribute to the king. But the regularization of Posa payment hardly made difference in the attitude and activities of the Nyishis as the raids and plunders continued unabated. With the decline of Ahom kingdom in Assam in the early part of 19th century, internal disorder and dissension cropped up; the tribal living in the border area did not lose their time to take a share of the common spoils, by plunder and aggression on their foothill neighbours.

It was in this state of affairs, the British took the reign in 1826 A.D. While realizing the problem, the government wanted to pay the Posa in terms of money in lieu of kind but the offer was not acceptable to the tribesmen for the simple reason that the money had no exchange value in their interior places. However, by employing tact or shrewdness (conciliation and force), the Britishers could able to make the tribe acceptable to the commutation of Posa payment from kind to cash. On the line of containing the raids and clashes along the foothills, the government enacted an Act in 1873, popularly known as 'Inner line Regulation of 1873'[23], which among others forbade the entry of outsiders into the tribal hills without having valid pass.

The frontier policy of the government was given new shape with the appointment of J.F Needham as Assistant Political Officer of frontier track in 1882. It is to be noted that the early administrators and for that matter the government was least interested to have contact with the people of north western part corresponding to present Nyishi inhabited districts. The topographical conditions with little or no immediate economic viability could be the possible reason of such lukewarm attitude towards this region. In practical purpose, the British never tried to occupy the territories of the frontier tribes and even refused to intervene in their internal affairs. They were only satisfied by receiving submission of tribes and their refraining from creating nuisance that too in the British territory.

From the early part of 20th century the relationship between the Nyishis and the Britishers took new turn as there were no persistent raids or clashes in the borders. Meanwhile, there was perceptible influence from the northern neighbours and the government had apprehension of possible threat to their northeast possession in future. Therefore, the government sent the Miri-Mission[24] in 1911-12 to the hills of Subansiri region primarily to acquaint the land and the people of hills and to assess the outside influence. The government duly approved the survey report and its recommendation and as a result the western section of North East Frontier was formed in 1913. Evidently, the administration was gradually extended and the whole tribal area was divided into the Balipara Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract in 1919. In order to bring effective administrative control, the Balipara Frontier Tract was separated into Sela Sub-Agency and Subansiri Area corresponding with the Kameng Region and Subansiri Region of Arunachal Pradesh. As a result of this bifurcation, the western branch of Nyishi came under the jurisdiction of Sela Sub-Agency and the eastern branch, which was numerically larger falls under the Subansiri division. In the processes, the Sela-Sub Agency was further divided into East Kameng, West Kameng and Tawang Disricts of which the Nyishis inhabit in East Kameng. Similarly, the Subansiri region has been bifurcated into four separate districts, where the Nyishis inhabit.

Like other tribal groups in the state, Nyishi society is also based on patriarchal and primogeniture is the fundamental law of inheritance though variations are also not uncommon. In the context of Arunachalee tribes, the structural formation of the social organizations seems to be quite similar but its stratification or division and the working pattern are different, as some tribes have evolved organized social institution while others have less organized institution. The

Table 1.2: Tribe-wise Population in Arunachal Pradesh: 1961-1991

Sl. No.	*Name*	*1961*	*1971*	*1981*	*1991*
1	Adi (group)*	77187	93959	120839	158059
2	Aka	2230	2345	1947	3531
3	Apatani	10793	12888	16580	22526
4	Deuri	-	2683	3608	5200
5	Hill Miri**	2442	8174	6936	11017
6	Khamba	1110	848	342	1333
7	Khampti	2644	4115	7010	8339
8	Khowa	659	703	625	1046
9	Memba	2431	2468	2679	1169
10	Miji	2079	3549	4074	5779
11	Mishing	2817	3359	5201	5899
12	Mishmi	19722	22561	24596	31329
13	Monpa	20799	28209	32902	38862
14	Nyishi	51023	82187	87075	116258
15	Nocte	19287	23416	26257	33720
16	Sherdukpen	1144	1639	2096	2254
17	Singpho	957	1567	2353	2978
18	Sulung***	1781	4288	4233	5448
19	Tagin	24055	22107	27124	28860
20	Tangsa	6741	13447	18921	26016
21	Wanchu	23382	28650	32441	38528
22	Lisu	78	926	5	1530

(*Source*: Census of India: 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991)

Notes: * Adi is divided into various sub-tribes and one of the major sub- tribes i.e. Galos have preferred to call themselves as Galo in place of Adi tribe.

** Hill Miris affirms and call themselves Nyishi as the words - 'Hill Miri' were coined and used by outsiders. But some of them still preferred to retain the words on the plea that it has been used for quite long time.

*** State Assembly has passed a resolution recommending the government of India to declare the Sulung (Puroik) tribe along with Bangru as sub-tribes of Nyishi tribe.

Adi's Moshup (Dormitory) and *Nyishi's Yapa Goya* (Youth or peer group) or *Apatani's Buliang* (Division based on age) may be cited as a prominent examples respectively.[25] Unlike other tribe, Nyishis do not have sub-tribes. This is why they are accounted as the single largest community in the state.

One striking feature of Nyishi society is that it is neither based on caste system nor stratified into classes, except a loose type of social distinction, which is not determined by birth or occupation. They evolved broad base family organization and a joint and extended family norms which still exist but altogether in changed forms. Nyishis are divided into five major phratries based on lineage called *Hoso* (Identification through descendent of same forefather) namely *Dopum, Dodum, Dolu, Anyia Hari* and *Hagung*. The first three are the descendents of the immediate son of *Atu Nyia i.e. Haring Ringdo Tado* while the last two are the direct sons of *Atu Nyia, Anyia Hari being his last son*. The phratry system and for that matter clan division is mainly important on social and religious aspects. The most striking feature is that the members of same phratry and clan would help and co-operate one another in socio-religious functions and they would share the blood and heart of a sacrificed or killed animal as a bond of brotherhood what may be called *Uyi Haa Debam Nam*. However, beyond this, it does not insist on same habitat nor forges separate political entity nor requires practising similar pattern of economic activities.[26]

In ideological term, the Nyishis considered the women as the source of peace, progress and prosperity. According to them, the importance and status of women increases and binds through an established 'reciprocal marital exchange' system in the society. However, the traditional Nyishi women were overburdened in their family affairs as they practically manage the family. This has deprived them from taking active part in other aspects of the society. But all sensible man would always consult or seek advice from his woman counterpart before taking any decision. Clan exogamy and tribe endogamy is the law of marriage. Clan is a very important component in the structural organization of the tribal society relating to marriage and breach of the clan rule is considered to be a serious offence. A reciprocal exchanges between both the parties i.e. the bride and the groom, actually binds them in more strict terms than one could imagine because it works as a renewing force through which the relationship goes generations together.

Slavery existed among the Nyishis since the time immemorial.

But it was quite different from the slavery system prevalent in other society as the basis of slavery was not birth or occupation. The master took the whole responsibility of their slaves including food, housing and clothing. In this way there was no much difference between freeman and slave because the treatment to the slaves was always humane and at times they could become freemen. Now slavery system is becoming a thing of the past as many of the earlier masters have started voluntarily freeing their slaves.

In the strict sense of the term Nyishis do not have political organization. In fact the Nyishis and for that matter the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh were not aware of the state and government other than their village and village councils. For them, their state was their village, which has its own natural geographical contiguous boundary. Their government was their village council, which was all conducive to serve their purpose while their sovereign ruler was nature and environment was their policy maker. The Nyishis do have politico-cum-judicial system called *Nyele*. A place where the contentious issue/problem is discussed to find out amicable solution is known as *Nyele Meram* or *Barekh Meram*. A medium through which the warring parties are persuaded for amicable settlement of the dispute is known as *Gingdung* or *Bungriang Bungte Angnam*. The decision of the *Nyele* is always guided by customary law, which prescribes a punishment of material compensation and sometime a social boycott too. Though it is not based on an institutionalized system yet *Nyele* is a unique mechanism to deal with the varied issues of the society with certain degree of satisfaction. *Nyokum* is a major festival of the community celebrated once a year while *Yullow Panam* is the highest ritual ceremony generally performed among the members of a clan or a family.

Except occasional trading contacts that too through limited barter system the Nyishis do not have close relation with their neighbouring tribes. Even they could hardly interact with their fellow Nyishis who dwell over large geographical regions with rugged topography that sustain their isolation from the rest of the world.

IV

Historiographical Survey

The colonial ethnographers had generated enormous data on the tribes of North East India. Some of the earlier works include Mackenzie's *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill* *tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* (1884), E.T. Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnography of Bengal* (1872, 1960), E.A. Gait's *History of Assam* (1926), etc. These works have provided us the first hand information about the composite tribal communities inhabiting the region.

Many have worked on Christianity in the context of northeast in general and community specific in particular. F.S Downs has written a number of books on Christianity. To mention a few: *The Mighty works of God: A brief history of the council of Baptist churches in North East India* (1971), *Christianity in North East India* (1983), etc. A denomination wise works, have also been carried out by few scholars such as David Syiemlieh, *A brief History of Catholic Church in Nagaland* (1990), Milton Sangma, *History of American Baptist Mission in North-East India* (1992) in two volumes. O.L. Snaitang, in his *Christianity and Social Change in Northeast India* (1993) has examined the role of Christianity in the context of over all social change in northeast India. He opines that Christianity has played a positive role in socio-cultural and economic transformation of the region. J. Puthenpurakal's (edited) *Impact of Christianity on North East India* (1996) is a collection of interesting essays relating to the impact of Christianity on the people of the region.

Coming to the Arunachal Pradesh in specific, first we need to keep in mind the report and tour diaries produced by the colonial administrators in response to the problems they encountered while administering the frontier tracts. Mention may be made of Dun's *Preliminary Notes on Daflas* (1896), Needham's Report on the Bebeijiya Mishmi Expedition - 1899 (1900), A. Hamilton's *In Abor Jungles* (1912), Duff's Report on Miri Mission (1912) etc. A few administrators who had basically anthropological background took up specific studies. Special mention may be made of Furer Haimendorf's *The Ethnographic Notes on the Tribes of Subansiri Region* (1947), *The Apa Tanis and their Neighbours* (1962), *A Himalayan Tribe: from Cattle to Cash* (1980), and *Highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh* (1982). However, while dealing with the Nyishi tribe, Haimendorf has generalized many aspects despite the fact that he had studied a small group of Nyishis inhabiting around the Apa Tani Plateau. U.G. Bower's *A Hidden Land'* (1953) is a travelogue related to the tribes of Subansiri belt.

Elwin's *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1959) has been a useful text for understanding and dealing with the problems of Arunachalee tribes. His *Democracy in NEFA* (1965) is an attempt to highlight the role and importance of traditional democratic institutions of the tribal communities and their relevance in tribal administration. Elwin's another documentary work on the tribes of Arunachal is *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India* (1959). Though Elwin's *The Tribal World of Elwin* (1964) is autobiographical in nature but we get a deep insight into the tribal life as well. Ramchandra Guha's book on Elwin, entitled '*Savaging the civilized*' (1999) provides us an interesting critique of many of Elwin's works. The other research works worth mentioning are: L.N. Chakraborty's *British Relations with the Hill Tribes of Assam* (1964) and *Glimpses of the early History of Arunachal* (1973), Sachin Roy's *Aspects of Padam and Minyong Culture* (1966), N. Sarkar's *Dances of Arunachal Pradesh*, (1974), M.L. Bose's *British Policy in North East Frontier Agency* (1979), J.N. Chaudhury's *Arunachal Panorama* (1973) and *Arunachal through the Ages* (1982).

Some of the recent research works that deal with different aspects of the changes taking place among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are: Gurudas Das, *Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in Transition* (1995) N.C. Roy & P.K. Kuri, *Land Reform in Arunachal Pradesh* (1998) and J.L. Dawar, *Cultural Identity of Tribes of North-East India: Movement for Cultural Identity among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh* (2003). Dr. Dawar's book deals with the official nationalist discourse of integration and its dialogue with the newly emerging intellectuals among the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh since 1950's. In the process of this dialogue emerged an agenda of resistance against the officially sponsored cultural hegemony and a process of identity formation. However, the book argues that the identity formation is a process and therefore it brings forth a healthy critique on the essentialist concept of identity.

The indigenous scholar's contribution has immensely enhanced our understanding of the various aspects of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They have provided deep insight into the processes of transition taking place in the society. To mention some of these scholars: Tai Nyori, *History and Culture of the Adis* (1993), T. Kani, *Advancing Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh* (1993) T. Mibang, *Social Change in Arunachal Pradesh* (1994), and N.N. Osik, *Modern History of Arunachal Pradesh* (1999).

As far as the research work on Nyishis is concerned, a special mention may be made of B.K. Shukla's book, *The Daflas of the Subansiri Region* (1965), as it is the only book so far written on Nyishi tribe. Shukla's work is basically descriptive in nature and does not take into account the changes taking place in the society.

The other work on this tribe is my own M.Phil. dissertation entitled, *Socio-cultural life of the Nyishis* (1997) (unpublished) where I dealt with the basic aspects of traditional Nyishi society and I had tried to correlate it with the modern changing society. Neelam Taram's *A Glimpses into Baptist Churches in Arunachal* (2001) and Toko Kach's Growth *of Baptist Churches and Impact on Socio-Cultural life of the Nyishi Tribe in Arunachal Pradesh* (2002) are compilations of various documents relating to the development of Christianity in Subansiri region.

V

Methodology

My work is ethno-historical in nature. I have used both extensive archival sources as well as oral sources. I had consulted the archival sources available in National Archive at New Delhi and in the State Archive at Itanagar. The tour diaries, memoirs and reports of the early administrators relating to NEFA (Now Arunachal Pradesh) were examined. In addition to the formal sources and government records, the records of NGOs and memoirs, reminiscences or views of socio-religious leaders are also taken into account.

The most important primary sources have been generated through oral literature by conducting an exhaustive. fieldwork. Needless to say, that, the oral literature has become as important a source as archival, especially in the context of studying the tribes. In the absence of written historical documents, I have used an extensive interview (both structured and unstructured) method with an added emphasis on old generation Nyishis that helped a lot for construction and reconstruction of socio-religious realities. The views of younger generation and upcoming intellectuals are also examined so as to correlate the changing pattern of the society under the impact of modernity and outside religions.

I have also used 'participant observation' method by joining in the important occasions like social and religious functions, community gathering, group discussion and individual interaction. My own experiences or reminiscences as a Nyishi over the considerable period from childhood onwards are also reflected in this study.

It is to be noted that since the study is purely qualitative in nature, statistical enquiry is thoroughly avoided. As the data is basically qualitative in nature, no attempt has been made to analyze them in quantitative terms. Nevertheless, in some cases, where data were amenable to quantification, a simple presentation of data in tabular form is used with a precise analysis.

VI

Structure of the book

The structure of this study is designed to understand the problem in a religio-historic perspective. In general, the tribal way of life is holistic one; there is integration of social, economic and religious institutions. In other words, the secular and sacred aspects are indistinguishable. In the second chapter an attempt has been made to study the traditional belief system, faith and practices prevalent among the Nyishis. The crude nature of religious belief and their popular concept of the origin and evolution of universe including man are thoroughly narrated. In the world of uncertainty amidst people's strong belief on *Weyi* and *Oram* (spirits - both malevolent and benevolent), priest plays a pivotal role by offering himself as a liaison between the human being and the unseen powers. In this chapter a special emphasis has been given on the institution of priesthood and also other related socio-religious practices in the context of traditional Nyishi society.

Chapter three examines how Nyishi's economy has been undergoing change as a result of the modernization and development during the post-independent period. A brief account of the factors responsible for the emergence of Nyishi identity is dealt in the fourth chapter. The emerging new educated social group and their role in taking the society to new direction have also been taken into account. Chapter five concentrates on the history of Christianity in the state and especially among the Nyishis and consequent emergence of new and separate identity. Since the archival sources relating to the spread of Christianity, its impact on the society and the people's response to it are scarce, therefore, I had to utilize primarily the tools of oral history.

In chapter six an attempt has been made to study the formation of religious identity based on indigenous traditions. The intellectuals among the Nyishis in particular and indigenous tribals of Arunachal in general had perceived threat from alien religions especially from Christianity and Hinduism. Therefore, they had been seeking their identity from their tradition through an indigenous religious movement. Attempt has been made among this group to reinterpret their religious traditions and in the process certain practices were sought to be eliminated and certain practices were selected, thus giving birth to invention of certain tradition. Only those aspects of religious tradition were selected which suited the needs and requirements of the contemporary society. This chapter is devoted to the analysis of this process of selection and rejection of certain traditions among the Nyishi. The concept of *Donyi Polo* - an indigenous religion and its certain point of commonality and differences are taken into account. A special section has been devoted to scrutinize the influence of Hinduism on indigenous religious movement.

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2

TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS BELIEF SYSTEM

Introduction

A large number of definitions of religion have been framed by the western scholars, that, it is impracticable to list these within the scope of this chapter. [1] Western-derived definitions 'have tended to emphasize the sharp distinction between the religious and non-religious dimensions of culture and some time have equated religion with beliefs, particularly belief in the supreme being.'[2] The popular terms like animism, primitive religions etc. have been used by western scholars to understand the tribal religion.[3] The term 'animism' properly refers to a theory set forth by English scholar E.B. Tylor (1832-70) in order to account for the origin and development of religion.[4] The distinctiveness of Tylor's theory 'was its assumption that the earliest form of religion was characterized by man's ideas concerning a plurality of spirits and ghosts.'[5] This theory of animism has been questioned by scholars.[6] The pre-historians, historians and anthropologists 'would agree that Tylor's theory has very little bearing on any thing they would consider a religious phenomenon.'[7] Regarding the usage of the term 'Primitive Religion', J.H. Thumra observes:

> *It is a term ... tends to use the term primitive in the sense of being inferior and thus when it applied to human beings and their religions it implies the mistaken notion of mental processes which are pre-logical and qualitatively inferior to that of the so-called civilized people. This attitude comes from the standpoint of value judgment of people who assume superiority of race, knowledge and culture over against other races. However, when we examine the so-called primitive people's mentality or other ways of life objectively, we will*

find that they are not primitive mentally, spiritually and in their moral standard. These people have acute mind and intrinsic intelligence and have a profound thinking and rationalistic ability in their own way. They have a long history, though unwritten behind them. [8]

It seems that the approach is pre-conditioned by popular western developmental ideologies that create a sense of inferiority to those who have faith in tribal religion. The fact is that a material backwardness cannot be taken as a yardstick to mean that their religion was undeveloped and primitive. The definitions framed by the western scholars exclude the tribal religion. In tribal societies, 'what the west calls religious is such an integral part of the total ongoing way of life that it is never experienced or thought of as something separable or narrowly distinguishable from the rest of the pattern.'[9] In a tribal society, the sociological, psychological, philosophical, ecological, economical, political and religious aspects are interwoven into a complex whole and no activity comes down entirely to fall within specific domain of a society. Therefore, understanding of any specific issue needs a holistic approach. Stating the nature of tribal religion, Vidyarthy and Rai remarks:

> *Experiences of certain day-to-day sudden happenings, of disease, death and unexplainable have led tribal people into believing in other than the material visible world i.e. in the invisible spirit world or supernatural power. They have established a kind of close relationship between themselves and this power by adjusting themselves to it in two ways, first by controlling or overpowering the spirit by enchanting or practicing some techniques and canalizing the power for good or bad and secondly by offering puja or worship to propitiate the super human power for acquisition of the things or object desired.*[10]

The ideas through which man perceives his different natural and supernatural worlds may evolve into a belief system. The realms of idea or belief system, faith and practice take material expression in the form of rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices. To a tribal, nature follows its own capricious ways which are beyond human control. A man is a part of the community of beings that includes other living creatures as well as elements, the landscapes, streams and rivers. Their relationship with natural object is either mutualism or antagonism and this relation put restraints on their day-to-day activities. In this chapter an attempt has been made to study the traditional religious belief systems, faiths and practices of the Nyishis. It is divided into following sections:

1. Myth: Creation and Evolution.
2. Popular beliefs.
3. Priesthood.
4. Ritual and Sacrifice.
5. Taboo, Oath and Ordeal.

I

Myth: Creation and Evolution

A myth 'is an expression of the sacred in words: it reports realities and events from the origin of the world that remains valid for the basis and purpose of all there is consequently, a myth functions as a model for human activity, society, wisdom and knowledge'.[11] A myth, whether its subject is the acts of deities or other extraordinary events, always takes us back to 'beginning of all things'; hence, the cosmology the birth of the world, is a principle theme.[12] In order to examine the prevailing socio-religious system of any society, it is equally important to know the basic knowledge about origin, evolution and genealogy of that society.

The religious belief of Nyishi is lucidly and extensively expressed in their traditional oral literature in the form of myths, legends, folklore or folk culture that is transmitted from generation to generation. As far as the creator or the supreme power that creates the entire universe and its components is concerned, there are three schools of thought among the Nyishis. In other words, there are three different (stories) theories relating to the origin and evolution *(Changte Dote ho Nyikum Nyia blah barman)* of the universe including the human race. One is, those who believe in *Jingbu Pabu Abu* as a creator, the other is, those who name the creator as *Korium-Kolu*, while, the third is, those who believe that the creation was through *Poyi-Nyai.* While the first two are almost same as their difference is found only in the name of creator but the third one is a bit different even in the context of evolution process. However, all of them accept the notion that an extra-ordinary spirit called *Chene Rulom Dola* was used to create the universe and its components. *Jingbu Pabu Abu* as the creator is most popular among the Nyishis. In the beginning, out of nothingness the universe was created in an unscrupulous or disordered form. The phrases explaining the origin are: *Sachang Ngarngum Tapum Rulom, Nyedo Ngarngum. Tapum Rele, Rulom Rele Pepa, Ho...Riumriam Riamriam Pepa...*[The whole universe was in fragile state and it cannot be described in an equivalent term. It can only be compared with a droplet of water that is floating on a leaf]

In this state of affairs, *Jingbu Pabu Abu* invoked his power through different supernatural means to create and evolve the present-day universe. It may be mentioned here that the Nyishis attached the creator as a male figure, which is clear from the very suffix word *Abu* (father). First of all the *Langkhu Chene Dola* and *Jingkio Urh Chene Dola* were invoked to give some kind of concrete shape and size to the universe. The power of *Kamkhu Chene Dola* was employed to create *Sachang* (the Earth), while through *Kamchang Chene Dola* the living things including the man and animal were created. Invoking the power of *Dote Chene Dola* created the heaven. The *Ishi*, (water) was created with the help of *Kela Harikh Chene Dola*. *Beyang Chene Dola* was invoked to create *Donyi*, (the Sun) while, *Paa Chene Dola* was employed for the creation of *Polo*, (the Moon). After the creation of major components of the universe, *Jingbu Abu*, (the creator) was disheartened to see that what ever He had created were in a state of complete mess. Therefore, at last He invoked the powers of *Ngumngo Abu* to categorize and separate the universe into *Changte*, (earth) and *Dote*, (heaven). Again in the process, the earth was made suitable for accommodating the entire living things; such as streams, rivers, valleys, hills, mountains and plains, while the natural objects including the celestial bodies like planets, stars, sun, moon etc. were put in the heaven. With this, the process of creation completed and *Jingbu Pabu Abu* had ceased from the scene.

We have seen that the power of *Kamchang Chene Dola* was employed to create all living things including the human being. In this process *Loma Chene Dola* was invoked to create *Nyikhu Tani*, the first man on the earth. With the coming of first man, a chain of descendents like *Nyema Tani, Nyiyang Tani, Nyidar Tani, Nyikum Tani* etc. were born on the earth. According to Nyishi mythology, the *Tanis* prior to *Atu Nyia Tani*, were half human and half spirit and they live together with all other living creatures. In fact, the *Tanis* (men) were endowed with extra-ordinary power to reign over the earth. The other creatures including the *Weyis* felt jealous of the power and authority enjoyed by the *Tanis* and hence, there was continuous intrigue and infighting between them. At last *Tani* was almost defeated by the *Weyis* through fraudulent and treacherous manner. *Tani* decided to destroy and finish the entire earth. But at this juncture *Tu Tugung* consoled him not to feel disheartened and advised him to go to *Ayu Donyi*, who will surely help him out. Accordingly he went there and subsequently entered into wedlock with *Jangte Ne*, a daughter of *Ayu Donyi*, and out of this marriage, *Atu Nyia Tani* was born.

The Nyishis believe that it was from *Atu Nyia Tani*, the actual human race started. It is to be noted that, with the completion of the creation, the supreme power or creator had practically disappeared but interestingly the creator had vested His powers in different ways and means for the wellbeing of entire human race. *Tu Tugung* was one of them who played an intermediary role to solve the dispute between *Tani* and the world of *Weyis* (spirits). Many of the belief systems, faiths and practices are evolved out of the struggle between *Tanis* and *Weyis* and ultimately the concept of religion emerged out of their struggle. *Atu Nyia Tani* had many sons as he had many wives. The prominent among them include - *Hato, Halo, Habing, Haying, Hakio, Hazi, Hai, Haring, Hagung* and *Hari*. The Nyishis believe that they are the immediate descendants of the last three sons i.e. *Haring, Hagung* and *Anyia Hari*. In the next generation, *Haring Ringdo Tado* had three sons namely *Dopum, Dodum* and *Dolu*. The descendent of these three groups are numerically larger today, while the descendents of other two groups - *Hagung and Anyia Hari* are less.

II

Popular Beliefs

In the process of evolution we have seen the coming of *Sachang* and *Nyedo,* but later on another world called *Weyi Nyoku* or *Nel Nyoku* evolved, as a result the Nyishis believed that the entire universe is divided into three worlds i.e. earth, heaven and netherworld respectively. *Sachang* is a dwelling place for living creatures including man, animal and plant; *Nyedo* is the abode of gods and goddesses, and other celestial bodies, while *Weyi/Nel Nyoku* is a place meant for the life after death. There is also an imaginary world called *Talang Nyoku*, which lies in between heaven and earth. The people believe that the persons who die at the ripe age or after prolonged illness, their *Yajyalu* (soul) goes to the netherworld, which lies inside the earth. But those who die of unnatural death like accident, murder, suicide etc. their soul will go to *Talang Nyoku*, which the Nyishis treat it as hell. However, all dead bodies are buried but the method and the ritual attached to it is different depending on the nature of the death. According to them death is nothing but a change of life from material world to spiritual world. At the netherworld, a person enjoys same honour and status, as he/she was enjoying during lifetime. It may be mentioned here that in the early period, death was unknown to the human being. It has come to the man due to his disobedience and callousness to the divine order or creator.

Nyishis attached much importance to the *Weyis*, (the spirits) whom they categorize into *Sobu Weyi* and *Dubu/Dene Weyi*, (benevolent) and (malevolent) respectively. The benevolent spirits include those deities whom the creator vested powers to look after the wellbeing of the mankind. These deities include *Donyibo, Siibo, Tugungbo, Riapingbo, Arkibo, Arubbo, Dugarbo, Dolbo, Gamdubo, Ringdubo, Parte-Ringtebo*, etc. The Nyishis do worship their ancestors because they believe in life after death in the form of *Sobu Weyi*, (benevolent spirit), who shall continue to protect and safeguard the living members of a family. The ancestor spirits or souls that come after death are sometimes called *Oram*. These *Sobu Weyi* (benevolent) and *Oram* can also become enemy of the man if they are not properly propitiated or worshiped. As per their myths, *Alu*, (day) is meant for the human being to search for their livelihood, while *Ayu*, (night) is for the spirits who come out from their respective abode to look around the prey, i.e. the human being. The weak souls of men become easy prey for the evil spirits who inflict various ways of trouble and suffering. In fact, the people have strong belief in the will power of a man. There is interlinking between the man's will power and his soul. According to their tradition, the world is full of *Weyis* and *Orams*. All spots and places, animals, plants, rivers, streams, ponds, trees, stones, hills and mountains are abodes of the spirits and so also the neighbourhoods, whether village or forest in which the people dwell in are full of spirits.

The Nyishis have firm conviction that a perfect equilibrium has to be maintained amongst the man, spirits and the nature. The human beings tend to infringe this balance and eventually invite trouble and suffering because the miseries, hardships, diseases, deaths and other natural calamities like drought, famine, earthquake, epidemic, warfare, accident etc. occur due to displeasure and wrath of the spirits (both benevolent and malevolent) who have one way or other keep control over the nature. These spirits could be made contented and pleased through worship or propitiation and appeasement in the form of rituals and sacrifices. Hence, the Nyishis evolved elaborate rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices that become the basic aspects of their socio-religious life. The *Weyis* and *Orams* (spirits) are of different type and their nature of actions or inflictions are also varied. They are not visible to the naked eye of an ordinary man. The priest can only see and talk to them through divination in the form of certain rituals and sacrifices. The human actions could knowingly or unknowingly offend and provoke the deities or spirits. The man's interaction with the nature in the form of accesses like reckless destruction of plants and animals, felling or rolling down of big trees and stones, polluting the streams and rivers, setting fire to the jungle etc. will naturally create disturbances and havoc to the deities or spirits who dwell in it. In such situation the offended spirits move around to take revenge in various ways, which can only be prevented through timely appeasement in the form of rituals and appropriate sacrifices.

The prominent *Sobu Weyi* (benevolent spirits) include *Donyi-Sii Weyi, Changtum-Bute Weyi, Parte-Ringte Weyi, Nyokum-Nyoin Weyi*, and *Longte-Yullow Weyi*, correspondingly - the gods and goddesses of heaven and earth, prosperity, crops and granary, wellbeing of community, animal husbandry and wellbeing of a family. There is no particular place or abode for these deities. But the responsibilities or areas of actions are identical as each of them is attached with particular aspect of human life and their activities. They can be invoked at any place and at any point of time. For instance, the *Parte-Ringte Weyi* (goddess of crops and granaries) is invoked ceremoniously and worshipped at the end of the harvesting in the agricultural field itself and these gods & goddesses are invited (appeased) back to the household who shall continue to guard and protect the crops from all adversaries. In fact, the people worship the deities throughout the year by means of propitiation through sacrifices thereby seeking their blessings for good health, peace, prosperity and the wellbeing of the individual, family and the community. The ancestor spirits are also equally worshipped for the same purpose. If these deities are not properly propitiated, they may let lose the evil spirits to do all kinds of harm/trouble to the human being. Therefore, one has to go for elaborate rituals and sacrifices so as to prevent the eventual wrath of the benevolent deities.

The *Dene Weyis* (malevolent spirits) are those who always do harm to the human beings in various ways. The most powerful malevolent spirit is the *Bur Weyi* (crocodile spirit), that dwells in the netherworld or places like lake, pound, slum valley, river and ocean. The *Bur Weyi* can cause heavy damages on earth by effecting landslide, erosion, flood etc. consequently the human habitations including agricultural field and animal husbandry are adversely affected. But the Nyishis are of the firm belief that even the malevolent spirits do not harm a man without rime and reason. However, they will always look for an opportunity to inflict trouble so that they may either take away the life of a person or acquire abundant booty in the form of sacrifices. The *Dojang Weyi* (spirit of sky) dwells in the atmosphere; when offended or displeased over the happenings on the earth, expresses its anger through thunder, storm, lightening, wind and rain. These sudden and violent changes in weather naturally affect the normal activities of the people including their socio-economic life. The next important malevolent spirit is *Yapum Weyi*, who makes the dense and thick forest his abode and generally hides in the big hollow of trees. With their hypnotizing power, *Yapum Weyi* sometime kidnaps or misleads the human beings especially the children. In such case, appropriate rituals as well as sacrifices are to be performed without which, a missing person cannot be traced.

Gangda or *Nyoku Weyi* (spirit of land) is another powerful malevolent spirit who is supposed to be much offended spirit as the human activities are centered on the land. In the strict sense of the term, the *Gangda* or *Nyoku Weyi* represents a number of spirits because all creatures including plants, animals, land mass, water etc. are owned by different spirits. In this way, the worshiping of this *Weyi* requires elaborate rituals and sacrifices, as each of the spirit is to be properly propitiated. The Nyishis believe that an epidemic occurs due to the wrath of *Doli Weyi* (spirit of epidemic), which could be prevented through a particular ritual i.e. putting barricade or encircling of the dwelling place and the sacrifices thereof. The soul of a person due to unnatural death - like accident, murder, suicide etc. becomes *Sonyiu Weyi* (worst type of evil spirit) and tends to harm the human being. The soul, because of the unnatural death (*Talang Chabu*), does not go to the abode of death or ancestors' palace; instead it loiters here and there around the atmosphere facing all types of hardship. Hence, the *Sonyiu Weyi* is compelled to inflict adversities on the human beings and induce them to become its friends after death. One interesting aspect of this *Weyi* is that even a lay man can make out who exactly is the spirit responsible for the illness of a person because a victim starts behaving and even talking in the same way as the person used to do before his/her unnatural death.

Sometime, few living individuals are also branded as having evil spirits, whom they call *Ramter* (witch craft) and *Jegru angbu* (evil eye). These spirits knowingly or unknowingly harm the fellow individuals. A person's personal enmity with another person may be inferred (proven) in the form of physical illness to that person. However, like other diseases it could also be treated and cured through evolved rituals and sacrifices offered to that particular living member of the community. It is believed that some persons are born with an evil potency in their eyes and whenever their eye falls on other person or even on food, drink, cattle, crop etc. harm is sure to inflict on them. Certain animals, birds and snakes are also believed to possess malevolent or evil eye, which has the power to destroy or kill a person, domestic animal, crop and human dwellings. People with evil eye are particularly jealous to the sight of the happiness, hilarity, healthy and wealth of others. They carried out their evil designs in various ways. For example, if an evil eye falls upon a pregnant woman, she may have miscarriage or face difficulty in giving birth to a child or the child may be born with physical deformity. If it is on food and drink, instantaneously it will create trouble inside the stomach, which may turn poisonous and lead to the death of a person. Hence, people used to throw away a piece of food/drink item by uttering *Oram bekhe*, purportedly for those spirits of evil eyes. Besides, the other precautions have to be always taken, like keeping oneself or the things aloof from the sight of such evil eye spirits.

Generally, the tribals attach much importance to the dream. They believe that the supernatural power (god) communicates the message to the living being through a dream. During the sleep, human souls ascend to the world of spirits including the ancestor spirits and interact with them. While wandering with them, these deities convey the impending dangers and also bestowed their blessings that are supposed to come in near future. The Nyishis do take their *Yuma* (dream) seriously as it is the only medium through which one could assess the incoming events of both sorrow as well as happy moment and one can also take necessary precaution to prevent the impending dangers. Basically the dreams are of two types i.e. *Yuma Mapu* and *Yuma Maru*, (positive or good dream) and (negative or bad dream) respectively. However, the interpretations of dreams are varied in nature and generally depend on the prevailing socio-religious belief system of the people. A positive dream is one, which foretells happy and thriving moment of an individual as well as a family while a negative dream sounded a kind of warning - telling the impending danger to a person or a family. For example, if a youthful person dreams of having grey hair, he will live a long life and similarly if a person saw the popular birds like *Puyu-Paga* and *Pung-Pugiung* (Horn bills etc.) in the dream, it purports that a person concerned will achieve success and thrives in the coming days. On the other hand, dream of seeing the setting sun is a sign of becoming orphan as either one or both the parents will die in near future and in the similar way dream of rolling stone or felling down of huge tree meant the death of prominent elder members of a family or a community. After sowing crops in the field, if one dreams of going for fetching water from bamboo made water-pipe (*Suku-Kamcho*) in the stream he/she will have good harvest from the field. Dreaming of marrying with dead person means nearer to death and one dreams of being surrounded by snakes is sure to fall ill. A person who saw bad dreams naturally feels perturbed and hence sought the guidance of the priest. With the help of the shaman or priest the required rituals and sacrifices are offered, through which it is believed that the anticipated trouble or danger might be averted.

III

Priesthood

The core meaning of the term priest in the western usage is – (i) the priest perform a sacrificial ritual, usually at a fixed location such as altar.[13]. (ii) The priest does so as a specialist on behalf of a community or congregation.[14] When "both of these are present", says Baruch A. Levine, "we have priesthood in a strict or narrow sense".[15] In the cross cultural and non-western use of the term 'priest', 'a priest is any religious specialist acting ritually for or on behalf of a community'.[16] In the tribal society, a priest offers himself as a liaison between the human being and the world of unseen powers. J.N. Chowdhury writes, "They are the shamans par excellence with the knowledge and power of negotiating with the spirit world. Their services are sought after during sickness or other misfortunes, when they prescribe the necessary rites or sacrifices for propitiating the inimical or *orams*."[17] The priest, being a dynamic person plays vital and multi-facet roles. When a person is ill, he is called for diagnosis; he is consulted to save crops from damages and enables the farmer to yield rich harvest; he ensures the protection of livestock and makes them to thrive; he also ensures the safe journey and assures a comfortable life even when a person departs from this world; he forecasts impending disasters and averts them; and above all, he has been the refuge, the solace to the people living in the darkness of evils surrounding them.

A whole variety of institution, training and initiation for work as a priest exist among world's religious traditions.[18] The priest to be "is expected to undertake regimes of physical and spiritual self-cultivation, the better to the worthy of, an effective in the practice of his role."[19] However, according to Nyishi tradition, a priest is neither inherited or appointed nor imparted any formal training. He is inborn and has imbibed himself a divine vision to become a priest. A priest carried out his services through various modes and methods of divination, which are spiritually evolved out of conventions and practices. As far their version, it is *Chene Weyi* (spirit through which a child is conceived and nurtured) who decides the future of a child even when he is still in the womb of a mother. The priest is also decided well before the birth of a child. With *Chene Weyi* guiding a person, brings up enthusiastically on the lines of priesthood. When a person becomes mature enough, he will see a typical dreams relating to the life and work of the priest. A prospective priest shall perform an appropriate ritual; with this he enlightens himself and achieves the miraculous power to heal and cure the sick person through different processes. Unlike other tribes, the Nyishi women do not become a priest. The priests are generally grouped into three categories. The first is *Bunyio Nyob*, who deals ordinary ailments; the second is *Bute Nyob*, that deals the highest order of rituals or sacrifices including *Yullow* ceremonies and the third is *Nyoki* or *Jeri Nyob*, gifted with extraordinary spiritual power, who could predict impending danger, cures epidemic, detects theft, heals fractured bone, cures dog and snake bite etc. In the strict sense of term the Nyishi priest does not occupy deserved and distinguished position in the society, as there is no separate class or status for them. But by virtue of their indispensable and yeoman services, they are always honoured, respected and acknowledged in the society. It is very interesting to know that *Weyis* (deities) choose themselves a particular priest to whom they likely to obey or listen to. Therefore, in every major rituals or festival ceremonies an omen examination is taken so as to ascertain the priest who could solemnize the rituals.

To have a clear understanding, let us examine the process of *Yullow* ceremonies and the role played by a priest. *Yullow* is the highest form of ritual ceremony which cannot be performed at random because it has to be decided through omen examinations. It also involves elaborate arrangement and the expenditure is much high in comparison to other rituals. When a family or a clan gets positive signal through omen test, they invite the prominent and renowned priests of the area; out of which one *Yullow Nyob*, (main priest) shall be chosen. With this, an appropriate time is fixed by keeping sufficient time for the preparation of *Opo* (local brewed wine) and other necessary items. On the appointed day, the host will send a messenger with *Opo Harcha* and *Chingph* (traditional food items) to the priest house. The priest along with his assistant (*Boo*), ceremoniously departs from their house towards the host's house;

where they will be accorded warm reception with a token of gift in the form of beads (*Tasang Nyelab*) that are to be tied in the *Mayap* (wing of eagle: instrument used by the priest) of the priest. Next day, early in the morning, the priest starts chanting the ritual songs, which will be followed or mimicked by his assistant (*Boo*). This will continue for three to five days and, in between these days all preparations including erection of altars and arrangement for sacrifices are made. The ritual structures are erected in such a way that it could represent or depict the symbols/images of almost all deities and accordingly sacrifices will be offered to each of them separately. It is a convention that the people of the locality gather in such function to offer voluntary services. The formal sacrifice, called *Weyi Papuknam* is performed at the concluding day. It is believed that in such occasion the souls of people are exposed to the spirits and sometime the weak ones become preys of those evil spirits. But the priest takes utmost care and vigil to ensure that the *Yajyalu* (souls) of all participants are well safeguarded and they are not induced to the world of evil spirits. It may be mentioned here that besides the main priest (*Buda Nyob*), there are also supporting priest (*Bubak Nyob*), namely the *Sotung* and *Galang Nyobs*, whose role is very limited as they deal only the specific spirits especially the malevolent ones.

The priest is ceremoniously sent back to his house exactly a day after the sacrifice. Before his departure, he pronounces the restriction or taboo to be adhered to strictly by the host family as well as the localities. It is obligatory to remunerate the priest in the form of swords, beads, clothes, Tibetan bells etc. and of course a shoulder of the sacrificed mithun or any animal. The other supporting priests and the assistant (*Boo)* are also remunerated properly. However, the quantity and the value of these remuneration items vary from family to family depending on their affordability. Duty of the priest does not end here. He has to visit the host's house frequently to perform *Tazar Dangnam* (ritual for lifting prohibitions), after which generally the normal activities resumes. The success and failure of the priest and for that matter the *Yullow Panam*, is judged and inferred with the subsequent events in the family. If there is no untoward incident and the family is consistently thriving in almost all aspects, one can infer that it was successful venture (*Yullow Pajubnam*) and the opposite is understandably failure. The priesthood is an individual achievement and as such there is no common or specific rule to be adhered to by the priest as a whole. The process of rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices, which are prescribed by the priest, are generally evolved out of convention and practices through out the generations. In fact, the power and status of a priest in his profession purely depends on the proficiency and the knowledge he gained through his own consistent efforts. The priestly gift is additional acquirements, which will certainly not take him off from his main occupation as a peasant. He is just one of them in every respect, except when he performs his duty. When he officiates as a priest, he has special dress, special equipment, special position or honour and special share of food and drinks. Thus, priesthood is a most important socio-religious institution in the society and priests are indispensable in tribal society.

IV

Rituals and Sacrifices

Rituals and sacrifices are the essential elements of tribal society. Both are complimentary in nature, because there cannot be a ritual without sacrifice and vice-versa. In a simple term, ritual is a process of identification and negotiation with the aggrieved deity or spirit, while the sacrifice is the final agreement between the two. In each ritual, there are elements of invocation, persuasion and petition followed by offering of sacrifices. A priest through divination carries it out in different ways. The sacrifices of all nature are made in terms of domesticated animals such as mithun, cow, pig, goat, fowl, egg, dog etc. depending on the demand and liking of the concerned deity or spirit. The origin of this process can be traced from the days of *Abo Tani* itself. The story goes like this: *Abo Tani* got his *Nyekhm Dungrang* (a small bamboo tube, where the wisdom or knowledge was stored), from *Arkhilayi* (a bestowed power who happened to be a father-in-law of *Abo Tani*), through which he could be able to watch the activities of *Weyis* and thereby easily defeat them. However, after strenuous struggle by using all tricks at their command, *Weyis* ultimately robbed this power from *Tani*. So, in absence of such power, *Tani* became almost wretched and his life was at stake in the hands of his rival *Weyis*. One day, he went to the kingdom of *Ayu Donyi* and sought her blessings. *Ayu Donyi*, with her righteousness handed over the wisdom (material wealth) on earth in a bamboo tube to *Tani* with clear instruction not to open the tube before he reached his palace. But *Tani*, with his weakness of curiosity was tempted to open the secret tube on the way itself, which contains among others, the domestic animals like *Sebe, Seie, Sebing, Erikh, Prokh* etc (all pet animals). When he opened the tube there was spontaneous utterances of scream or cry of the animals inside and these were being overheard by the *Weyis* who responded back claiming each of the animal. In this way for the first time these animals (wealth of man) were exposed to the spirits and become prey for them in lieu of human beings.

In the related events, once *Tani* fell seriously ill, believed to have been inflicted by the *Weyis*. Feeling pity on *Tani*, once again *Ayu Donyi* came for his rescue, and this time she asked the *Weyis* not to harm *Tani* but in his place they can take away the wealth in the form of domesticated animals, which they were longing for. The mythical words goes: *Tani nyi dedi bue Sebe deyato, Tani nyi dedi bue Sie deyato, Tani nyi dedi bue Bingtung deyato, Tani nyi dedi bue Erikh deyato, Tani nyi dedi bue Tabi deyato* ... (Those who want to finish Tani, take away mithun, cow, goat, pig, fowl etc. but spare his life). It is believed that from that incident the process of sacrifice began. Thus, human being started to propitiate and appease the *Sobu Weyi* and *Dene Weyi*, (benevolent and malevolent spirits) so as to live a happy, prosperous and meaningful life. When a person falls ill, a priest is invited initially to invoke the probable deities or spirit which will be followed by identification of the concerned/main spirit and ascertain the actual mode of rituals and sacrifices through omen examinations. As per the indications in the omen test through chicken liver, pig liver and egg, the priest prescribed the nature and medium of the entire process and accordingly all preparations are made. It is very interesting to know that the spirits have their own choice for the sacrificial items. Sometime, a particular colour, sex as well as age group of a mithun or any animal is prescribed by the spirits themselves. Man has no choice but to arrange as per the demand, otherwise the deity may turn hostile to the man. In a ritual structure (*Yugang*), the deities or spirits are meticulously represented in replica form where sacrifices are offered. The bloodstain of sacrificed animal is profusely smeared against the symbol of each deity purportedly as a sign of offering. After every ritual and sacrifice, the priest pronounced the dos and don'ts for the individual, family and the localities. Putting of restriction is mandatory as well as necessary following the agreement between the man and the spirits, violation of which will tantamount to the breach of agreement and thus reoccurrence of the sufferings. The lifting of such restriction requires another but smaller ritual called *Tazar Dangnam*, which shall be performed by the priest himself.

Mode, method and duration of any ritual and sacrifice are entirely depend on the desire of the concerned deity or spirits that are invariably indicated in the omen examinations. The major rituals like *Yullow* ceremonies, the actual process may continue for three to five days in which a mithun sacrifice is compulsory. *Bushar Weyi* is the most dreaded ritual in terms of its meaning, method and the implications. In this ritual a *Bushar Sonam* (war dance - a most ferocious dance) is performed in which the participants hold their sword or spear above to sparkle with roaring and murmuring sound (*hoo...hmm...*), spontaneously jumping around the *Bushar Yugang* (altar). The priest induces the dangerous *Weyis* (evil spirits) through enchanting and offering eggs in the bottom of altar. The souls of malevolent spirits are lured and when they enter into altar to take away the laid egg, all of sudden they are killed with the help of *Nangkio* (spears). It so happens, some time a soul of weak man may also be killed mistakenly. But the priest takes utmost care to avoid such mistake. Ritual performance is compulsory after killing a tiger, a lion, and an elephant, and even after the felling of *Sangrekh* (*peepal*) tree. The Nyishis never intend to kill these animals, as they believed that killing any of them is equivalent to kill a man. Both elephant and lion are believed to be dreaded with evil spirits whereas the tiger was once a brother of man. Hence, one who kills these animals has to undertake a series of rituals and sacrifices, followed by strenuous and complicated taboos.

In contrast to the popular Hindu mythology of *peepal* tree as a sacred tree, the Nyishis treat *Sangrekh sangne* (*peepal* tree) as the den of evil spirits. It is only or rarely felled to avenge the evil spirits, for instance, when a beloved one dies and when a series of deaths occur in the family. Here also one has to go for elaborate rituals and sacrifices. In case of natural disaster or calamity due to flood, cyclone, epidemic, starvation etc. the people of localities join together to worship the deities in the form of festival called *Nyoin* or *Nyokum*. In fact, *Nyokum* festival is an extension or amalgamation of the *Yullows*, which are generally performed by an individual family or a clan. *Oram Paknam* is the simplest ritual that can cure the ordinary ailment like fever, headache, stomach pain etc. Even an ordinary man can perform it with little knowledge about the subject because the process involves simply burning of a *Mekh* (local smoking dried leaf), the duration of which is hardly three to five minutes. Ritual and sacrifice had become a part and parcel of the Nyishi life, which is encompassed with numerous belief system, faith and practices. It starts from the birth of a child and goes on till the death. But even after death, the living members continue to worship their ancestors. There is strong belief that if the ancestors are not worshiped up to their satisfaction, they may curse the living members who eventually suffer. Generally a

Sebe (mithun) is sacrificed after an appropriate ritual in the name of a dead person during the burial of dead body.

V

Taboo, Oath and Ordeal

The word taboo denotes prohibition, which could mean a forbidden activity, something that is not permitted, something stands against social approval and also disallowed by religious norms of a given society. Taboo may be defined as restriction established to guard against supernaturally evil and dangerous things like plants, animals, and objects or even the persons especially those believe to have been possessed by evil spirits. 'Therefore, tabooed objects or things are not to be seen, touched, heard, smelt or tested, the violation of which will automatically invite the wrath or anger of the supernatural power and the evil spirits too.'[20] The taboo extends into all the aspects of human life and always acts as a restraining force for both physical actions and mental desires. According to Nyishi tradition, taboos are of two types i.e. the conventional or customary taboos and the taboos pronounced by the priest. As their mythology goes, *Abu Tani* and *Weyis* were the contemporaries. *Abu Tani* was given extra power or trick to deal with other living creatures on the earth. *Weyis* felt jealous of his extra power and authority over them. They were anxiously looking for an opportunity to cause trouble to *Tani* and thereby snatch the power enjoyed by him. There was persistent plot and fight between the two. Seeing this, *Tu Tugung* (bestowed with power) offered mediation between *Tani* and *Weyi* to settle their problem that had become a matter of concern for every body. The entire landmass including streams and rivers were invariably demarcated separately for *Abu Tani* and *Weyis*. The lands which were suitable for human settlement were given to *Abu Tani*, while the barren lands which were inaccessible and not useful for human habitat was earmarked for *Weyis*. Similarly, plant and animal, river and ocean were also properly demarcated with certain sign or symbol. The plants and trees with distinct structure (*Domrang, Sangrik, Sangkang, Taraposi, Kamyar, etc.*) were not touched or used by the human beings as these were earmarked for *Weyis*. Cane and bamboo (*Osso dombangbo, Aie hatak-hanakbo*), with knotted structure are not used. Similarly, huge trees, stones, ponds, lakes, marshy lands, turbulent rivers and oceans are believed to be an abode of spirits. The snakes and some birds like owl, vulture, crow etc. (*Pup, Mala*, and *Powak*) are dreaded as evil spirits and hence they are neither killed nor consumed.

In tribal society, taboo relating to sex is universal. Among the Nyishis, sexual intimacy between the members of same family or same clan is unthinkable. It is believed that all clansmen are related through blood and have to avoid sexual intimacy. Hence, the incest is strictly punishable not only by the clansmen but by the whole community. A couple who commits incest is immediately excommunicated or driven away from the village for the fear that their sin will be visited by divine curse to any one of the villagers. In the same way, while going for hunting or fishing, people often abstain from physical contact even with their own wives; otherwise the mission would be a failure. A youth is tabooed to take the meat of wild animal like bear, deer, boar etc. killed by him for the first time, on the ground that he will lose his hunting acumen. People attached utmost importance to the taboos relating to eating and sharing the meat of animals both wild and domestic. Certain specific portions of meat are not supposed to be shared by any one. Heart, head and blood inside the stomach of a killed animal are always shared only amongst the members of a same clan. There is also a peculiar set of taboos placed in the event of a quarrel between two people on any issue. Sometimes it so happens that the individuals who quarrel with each other declare publicly that they will not enter each other's house and even share food and drink. This kind of self-imposed taboo can be lifted with the settlement of dispute between the concerned parties.

Generally, a husband is restricted to kill animal, bird, insect and snake, when his wife is at advanced stage of pregnancy. He must also abstain from joining a funeral ceremony. If he violates, it is believed that the child in his wife's womb will be affected in different ways. Women and children are restricted to take part in the disposal of dead body especially in the event of unnatural death. The people who take part in the burial process have to go for *Pahi* ritual (cleansing ceremony) before they enter into the house, on the ground that they may bring sorrow and misfortune. Men are not supposed to do the activities and the affairs of women and vice-versa. This, what they called *Arh Anyo* will bring misfortune in the form of death to either of them. For instance, if a husband prepares food (women prepares food) very often, one day either he will widower or his wife will become widow. A woman is also tabooed during menstruation and childbirth. Before cleansing or purification ceremony, she is not allowed to freely mingle with other people. She is also tabooed to have sexual relation with her husband during this period. It is believed that if these are not properly observed, it will bring impurity and disgrace to the individual and the family as a whole. A taboo is an integral part of every ritual and sacrifice without which it is treated as incomplete. After solemnization, the priest pronounces restrictions to be strictly observed by all concerned, the negligence of which will tantamount to the relapse of the problem. For instance, the movement of a patient is restricted for specific days depending on the nature of ritual involved. His food in terms of item is drastically reduced as he is permitted to take only a few eatable items. The restricted items include green chilly, raw vegetable, pumpkin, cucumber, root, fruit, certain meats etc. After a considerable period of time these restrictions are lifted through a ritual called *Tazar Dangnam*. A common phenomenon connected with taboo is the observance of *Arh Donam* (prohibition days). The days of prohibition are determined by the nature and seriousness of the event or incident. For example, if there is a death of old and prominent person in the village, the prohibition days could be stretched from three to five days consecutively; whereas for the death of minor or grown up children it could be a day only. Similarly, after every major ritual or ceremonies, the localities have to observe prohibition for five to seven days, while for minor rituals it may be only a day or two. The observance of *Arh Donam* is mandatory for individual, clan and the community as a whole because it affects them in one way or other. During those restricted days, people are to abstain from normal manual works and avoid going out and contact with out side world. The basic philosophy connected with the observance of prohibition is for the peace, tranquility, prosperity and above all wellbeing of the individual and community.

In the absence of written legal or moral system to adjudicate the intricacies in the society, Nyishis evolved a cruel or harsh kind of proving the guilt and innocent called '*Dingdung Dingnam* and *Sudung Eiknam* (oath and ordeal respectively).'[21] We can say that when human discernment is proved inadequate or helpless to decide the dispute, supernatural guidance is sought through oath and ordeal. An oath is a solemn declaration of the truth of a statement.[22] In this affirmation, the supernatural power is invoked to act as witness and also to pronounce the verdict. The speaker calls upon the supernatural power to affect something hurtful or calamitous, if he/she is guilty. Among the Nyishis the commonest way of taking oath is by uttering uncommon (prohibited) words or sentences in the name of *Ane Donyi* (whom they treat as supernatural power). For example, they may utter, 'let the tiger kill me, elephant tramp over me and snake bite me, (*Pate cheyato Site chajabyato, Tabe cheyato*), if I am guilty.' They may also call, 'let my life, my children and grand children be cursed, if I am guilty.' When these oaths are taken, obviously there is no immediate effect. The plaintiffs wait till the oath taker meets some untoward incident or death, and then infers that he/she has perjured. In fact, a person must prepare to face the consequences what so ever may be due to his/her oath of affirmation before the supernatural power. An oath is taken between the two individuals, clan wise, village wise or even by groups. Strictly speaking, oath is hardly taken unless there is complicated and serious dispute that too without sufficient evidence to prove and settle it. Generally, oath is not often encouraged even for one who is on right side, because its implications and consequences are always dangerous to the individual and the family. However, a person may also voluntarily take an oath in order to affirm his word as right, truth and honest.

An ordeal is an extreme method of administering justice in the society. It is purely based on magico-religious as the whole process involves rituals, generally administered by at least two renowned priests acting for and against the accused. It is believed that *Poter-Mite Weyi* (justice giver) judge the ordeals who will eventually protect the innocent while the guilty will be cursed in different ways. In fact, an ordeal is a method to determine instantaneously the guilt or innocence of an accused person. Among the Nyishis, *SudungEinam* (putting hand in boiling water) is a common method of ordeal. In this process of ordeal, a stone is placed deep inside the bamboo tube containing boiling water (100 degree centigrade) and the accused is asked to take it out from his right hand. If he is innocent, no harm will come to him but if he is guilty, he will be burned or scalded in his hand. In such ordeal at least two diviners or priests are arranged who will do chanting to invoke the Almighty to protect the innocent and punish the culprit. Taking poison prepared out of roots and plants is another method of ordeal test to ascertain the guilt and innocent of an accused. In this case, the accused takes the poison in public view and if innocent, the divinity (justice giver) will cause him to vomit out immediately but if he is guilty, the poison will remain inside which may cause death also. Blessings and curses are always connected with oath and ordeal, because God or supernatural power is believed to be present in all such acts who shall pronounce His/Her verdict in either ways. The blessing is always expected to be upon the obedient or innocent person, while the Almighty would curse the disobedient or cheater by causing sickness, deformity, short life and so on.

With the advent of modernity and its tremendous impact on the society, obviously many of the indigenous belief systems, faiths and practices are now getting eroded. The changes are visible not only in materialistic viewpoint but also in moral and spiritual aspects. This is inevitable in accordance with the emerging wider context within which tribal societies interact with each other and the world out side. As a sequel to it, various forms of revivalist or reformist movements are bound to surface and as an extension of such process indigenous faiths and practices create a new cultural space for the people. There are many elements in the traditional customs, rituals and practices that are inconsistent with modern day life. But this is also true to most of the religion in the world that they have passed through successive reform movements initiated by great men and thinkers. However, in tribal society, the foundation of such movements has to be built out of the emic or insiders perception. Otherwise we may find a situation in which what are intrinsically good, moral and desirable is also dispelled and discarded along with what are undesirable and redundant.

Thus, the belief system, faith and practices of Nyishis broadly represent their socio-cultural and religious specialties. There is overlapping of different aspects, as they do not evolve separate ideology. For instance, their religious practices have intrinsic relations with other customs and usages. The indigenous faiths and practices perpetuate worshipping of gods and goddesses (supernatural power) to ensure that the entire humanity is well safeguarded against all evils, both natural and man made thereby create a balanced and congenial environment and to provide sufficient materials of self-sustenance.

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3

ECONOMY

—Continuity and Change

Introduction

The tribal society and its culture are centered on nature. In the broad framework of nature, man and spirit complex, we find that all of them function to give a particular way of life to the tribal. All these are inter-dependent and interact within this framework. However, they can be classified on the basis of the degree of their status and development. Dr. Verrier Elwin, one of the authorities on tribal studies in India, 'classified the tribals into four groups according to their stages of socio-cultural and economic development.'[1] The first category includes the purest and distinct tribal group who can otherwise be called highlanders. Their religion is characteristic and alive, their tribal organization is unimpaired, their artistic and choreographic traditions are unbroken and their mythology still vitalizes the healthy organization of tribal life. Geographical considerations have largely protected them from the debasing contact of the plain. The second category of the tribes is those who have been experiencing contact with the plains and consequently have been undergoing changes. This group though retaining their tribal mode of living, exhibits certain characteristics in contrast to the first group, like individualistic, more contaminated by the life outside, less simple and less honest than the members of the tribes belonging to the first category. The third category constitutes the largest section of the tribal, who are in a peculiar state of transition. According to some investigation, they are tribal in name but have become backward Hindus', constituting a sizeable section of lower rung of Hindu society; while one section is described as Christians. These tribes have been appreciably affected by external contacts. They have been exposed to the influences of economic and socio-cultural forces of Hindu society. They have been also subjected to Missionary influences. The fourth category consist of the old aristocracy of the country represented today by tribes like great Bhils and Naga Chieftains, the Gond Rajas, Santhals etc. They retain old tribal names and their clan and totem rules and also observe elements of tribal religion though they generally adopt the full Hindu faith and live in modern and even European style. According to Elwin, tribals of this class have won the battle of cultural contacts. It means that they have acquired aristocratic traditions, economic stability, affluence, outside encouragement, certain arrogance and self confidence-characteristics alike of ancient families and modern enterprises.

According to the above classifications, the majority of the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh including the Nyishi belong to the first category, i.e. the purest and distinct tribal group; because each tribe had evolved distinct socio-cultural ethos that are purely based on local or communal perspectives. There was hardly any contact and in that matter intermixture with the outsiders prior to the Independence of India. The Government of Independent India, under the dictum of 'Nehruvian model' of development, followed a policy based on protective measures, cautiously and carefully in the erstwhile NEFA, now Arunachal Pradesh with a view to safeguard the tribal and their distinct culture from sudden exposure to the outsiders. According to Pandit Nehru: 'The problem of the tribal area is to make the people feel that they have perfect freedom to live their own lives and to develop according to their wishes and genius. India to them should signify not only a protecting force but a liberating one. Any conception that India is ruling them and that they are the ruled, or that customs and habits with which they are unfamiliar are going to be imposed upon them, will alienate them.'[2]

Verrier Elwin's contributions to the tribals have been immense and noteworthy. However, his being an outsider had been haunting him especially from the critics. But he had won the hearts of not only the tribals but also the majority of Indians. Once in a Lok Sabha debate,(18 Aug'1960) Hem Barua, an M.P. from Assam, vociferously opposed the policies recommended by Verrier Elwin in his book, *'A Philosophy for NEFA'* and expressed his doubt about the integrity of this 'British philosopher-anthropologist' turned tribal philosopher. But Jaipal Singh, a tribal leader from Jharkhand who was leading the movement for a separate tribal state, contradicted him. 'Dr. Verrier Elwin,' he reminded his colleague, 'is more Indian than Shri Hem

Barua. He is more tribal now than Jaipal Singh.'[3] While writing foreword to Elwin's book, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, Nehru commented that Elwin: 'has done me the honour of saying that he is a missionary of my views on tribal affairs. As a matter of fact, I have learnt much from him, for he is both an expert on the subject with great experience and a friend of the tribal folk. I have little experience of tribal life and my own views, vague as they were, have developed under the impact of certain circumstances and of Verrier Elwin's own writing. It could, therefore, be more correct to say that I have learnt from him rather than that I have influenced him in any way.'[4]

Through Elwin's book, Nehru outlined his five fundamental principles of development in tribal areas; which, Elwin later publicized as 'Prime Minister's Panchsheel for tribal development'[5] in consonance of the famous five principles for international co-operation offered by Nehru at the Bandung conference of NAM in 1955. The five fundamental principles include:

1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own tradition, art and culture.
2. Tribal rights in land and forest should be protected.
3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
4. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to their own social and cultural institutions.
5. We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent but the quality of human character that is evolved.

In the initial years, the growth of consciousness among the people in almost all fronts i.e. social, economic, political, cultural, education as well as religion was very slow. Elwin's tribal policy of non-intervention, popularly termed by his critics as 'museum piece for anthropological studies' gained climax. However, situation changed with the rising of separatist movements in northeast India and a potential challenge from our giant neighbour - China. During and after the Chinese aggression in 1962, Elwin's Philosophy for NEFA was condemned by almost all sections of the society. In his autobiography, Elwin himself said, 'The Chinese invasion (1962) of

NEFA set everyone thinking about the frontier but, instead of acclaiming our policy which had ensured a loyal and even enthusiastic local population to support the defence forces, a number of critics made it the subject of bitter and extravagant attack.' [6] In his defence, Elwin further said:

> *Not one in a hundred of the people who so readily denounced A Philosophy for NEFA appeared to have even read it. The main reason why it was believed to have failed was that I was supposed to have advocated a philosophy of isolation, to have urged the separation of NEFA from the people of Assam, and naturally the old cry of keeping the tribes as museum specimens was raised again, though no one could point out how any of this had affected the course of the military operations. Generally my critics attributed to my (one) views, which were the exact opposite of what I had advocated. In actual fact, I had not supported any policy of isolation of the NEFA but had devoted several pages of this book to condemning it. The inner line, as it was called, by which the frontier is kept as a restricted area only to be entered by authorized persons, was established eighty five years before my book was written and though I realize I am getting on, I am not as old as that. As for the Assamese people, for whom I have great affection and respect, I had included in my book the suggestion that every scheme of development, progress or welfare in NEFA should be submitted to the test whether it would help to integrate the tribal people with Assam and, of course, with India as a whole.*[7]

The advent of modernity and the subsequent processes of development have accentuated tremendous changes among the people in all respects. In this chapter attempt has been made to study the emerging changes with special reference to the economy of the Nyishis. It is divided into the following sections:

1. Traditional Economy.
2. Economic change and continuity.

I

Traditional Economy

Economy is an important constituent of the community life and plays a decisive role in the formation of the culture and social structure of society. R. Piddington writes, 'Economic system is designed to satisfy material wants of the people, to organize production, to control distribution and determine rights and claim of ownership within the community.'[8] B. Kuppuswamy said, 'In the simple tribal economy there are no separate economic activities. The economic, religious the political activities and others are interwoven. Further, the tribal economy is essentially of subsistence type, in which the production is for direct consumption.'[9] Similarly, K.S. Singh describes the tribal economy in the following way:

> *Economy of the tribe is a projection of tribal society, a response to the ecosystem in which it is placed, its function of production and distribution are governed by the bonds of kinship within or between families, class and kindred. Production is based on the exploitation of the resources locally and easily available with the crude technology largely for consumption. Family is the unit of production, with little specialization and division of labour beyond that based on sex and age. Distribution of goods is regulated by the considerations of reciprocity. The ideal state of primitive economy is thus described as self-sufficient though of a subsistence level, non-acquisitive, non-machine and non-monetary.*[10]

In a tribal economy, the mode of production is traditional, indigenous and culturally predominant. The manner of its production is monolithic in character because the tribals as such are a single body without any class, they are ultimately a social unit and at the same time they are entrepreneurs, workers, producers and consumers. The system of distribution is linked to the barter or mutual exchange system. Hence, the currency or monetary system has little role in the tribal economy. The traditional economy is always centred on the mobilization of local limited resources and meeting up the local demands. At the same time all economic activities are determined by the evolved socio-cultural and religious belief of the people. Agriculture has been the mainstay of the Nyishis since the time immemorial. The shifting cultivation by slash-and burnt method called *Tumph Rongo* (jhum) is the type of agricultural practice by almost all tribes of the state. Traditionally, the tribals produced for their own consumption, as barring a few other necessaries the people are more or less self sufficient in their food items. The production is always determined by family requirement and not by profit that can be gained from it. So the total production is very limited and the surplus if any is sold to a person or a family who are in short of those items. During flood, drought or famine, some time caused by rat menace, people used to depend on forest product like *Tachi, Tashe, Tabe* etc. for their subsistence.

Jhum cultivation involves laborious process, required to put work for almost round the year. The advantage of this practice is that in a single plot a bulk of crops can be raised. The different processes and the phases of cultivation are ultimately determined by the weather condition and the season which are inferred on the basis of the appearance of particular type of bird and insect. Generally, the Nyishis practise two types of jhum cultivation on the basis of ripping pattern of the crops. One is called *'Teming Rongo'*, field proximity to the house on lightly manure land, where early ripping ones are grown. The other is *'Rekhte Rongo'*, a distance clearing, where the bulk of late ripping crops is grown.[11] A typical Nyishi jhum field is used for growing variety of crops based on mixed cropping pattern. The important crops include rice, maize, millet, wheat, potato, mustard, pumpkin, cucumber, ginger, chilly, sugarcane, vegetables of variety type etc.[12] Labour mobilization is always made on the basis of mutual reciprocity called *Rey Angnam*. Manpower can be mobilized either individually or in group, depending on the nature of work. A community service is also arranged for those needy villagers on self-help basis.

As the Nyishis evolved a joint family system, generally no individual owns properties, both movable and immovable. The family jointly owns the land and any member of the family could use it. There are also such pieces of land, which are owned by a clan and a community as a whole, and they are basically meant for hunting, fishing and using the resources available. In traditional Nyishi society except land, there is no other immovable property. The movable properties include traditional valued items like *Talu* (brass plate), *Mazi* (Tibetan tongueless bell), *Tasang* (bead), *Dumping* (comb like item), *Kozi* (bangle), *Huhi* (disc), *Oriok* (sword), domesticated animals such as *Sebe* (Mithun, a bose front talis), *Shey* (cow), *Sebing* (goat), *Erik* (pig) and agriculture products like *Am* (rice), *Teim* (millet), *Topu* (maize) and other durable food items. The sons and daughters of a person inherit these properties and the male members have always much say over it, as the society is patriarchal. There is not much economic disparity in the society because land is still cheap and abundant; nearly every one could become self-sufficient. However, some families are relatively affluent or rich while others are poor but the difference between them is negligible on the fact that the poor could also subsist themselves after continued struggle or hard labour. Till recently, the status of a person or a family was judged through his consistent economic stability which was measured on the basis of sufficient agricultural production for consumption (not necessarily for making profit), owning traditional valued ornaments and the addition of as much as domestic animals. Interestingly, to have more wives and children is also a symbol of the status of a person.

Besides agriculture, animal husbandry is the other important economic activity of the tribals. For Nyishi, mithun is the most valued and sacred animal; every one is fond of rearing it. It is interesting to know that almost every Nyishi family possesses Mithun in varying numbers. Unlike other Mithun breeders (Tibetans, who breed for the purpose of ploughing and milk), Nyishis practically use Mithun for meat consumption. Owning Mithun naturally adds status to a person and stands good stead for those who are in shortage of food grains as it can be exchanged for food items. Mithun is highly used for marriages, as it is the only medium of exchanges for the payment of bride price. There is mythological background as to how Mithun and bridal is exchanged. It can also be used for fetching prestigious and costly traditional valuables such as *Mazi, Talu, Tasang* etc. Mithun is treated as sacred because in almost all ceremonial rituals, sacrifice of Mithun is compulsory. Owning or rearing of Mithun and for that matter any other domestic animals is not every body's cup of tea. It is being attached to 'God gift' as the well being of animal is under the lap of nature. So if a person is favoured or venerated, he could tame as many Mithuns as he can. In fact, taming Mithun is not as laborious as one could think. The animal is allowed to move around freely in the forest and pastureland. Only once or twice in a month the owner goes to the forest to watch the animal, occasionally ties and feeds them salt in order to keep them used to contact with human beings. A Mithun is also to be protected from epidemic like foot & mouth diseases and from becoming a prey of wild animals like tiger, leopard, fox etc.

Along with agriculture and allied activities, the Nyishis are expert in handicrafts i.e. weaving, cane & bamboo works, pottery, blacksmith, wood carving and carpentry etc. traditionally, the basic purpose of producing these craft articles was to meet the demands of the family. The products are simple and in crude form without giving much attention on design and style. Unlike early Indian societies, there is no division of labour on the basis of caste as these works are carried out in addition to the normal agricultural activities. However, the works are attributed on the basis of gender. For example, weaving and pottery are exclusively done by women folk, whereas, men take up the bamboo & cane works, blacksmith, woodcarving & carpentry.

Agriculture, livestock breeding, hunting and fishing sustained the Nyishis to maintain a high degree of self-sufficiency in so far as food is concerned. However, the additional requirements such as cloth, utensil, salt etc. are obtained through barter trade-evolved since the time immemorial, among themselves and from their neighbours. Early Nyishis confined their trading activities amongst the tribesmen themselves and with the people across the northern border called *Nyeme chanam* i.e. trade link with the Tibetans. The day-to-day necessities including food grain, cloth, sword, cane, bamboo and wood works etc. were the trading items amongst the tribals. Their export items to the northern neighbours include skins of animals like tiger, lion, monkey, leopard, fox, fish-otter, barking deer, crow, snakes skin, as well as cane rope, sago-pith, madder and variety of dyes etc., whereas their import items were brass plate, bells of varied nature, beads of all varieties, long sword and notably Tibetan rock salt, popularly called *Mape Alu*. However, with the discovery of their trading route with the southern neighbours the Nyishis preferred to come down for fetching their essentials. The hill man took their forest products such as bamboo shoot, palm leave and incense, chilly, taro, maize, oil seed, brinjal, bean, tomato etc. for exchanging cotton & silk cloth, utensil, iron implement and above all salt which was not found in their country.

The British occupation of Assam and its subsequent commutation of Posa payment to the frontier tribes into cash (currency) had finally shattered the barter type of traditional economy. The trade fairs and local bazaars were organized at different spots along the foothills, where the ready-made articles were exposed to the tribal. With the turn of the century, the secluded traditional economy was gradually transformed to multi-dimensional mode of economy.

II

Economic Changes and Continuity

At the dawn of Independence, Arunachal Pradesh was still an unexplored land. The government did not have uniform set of economic planning for NEFA at par with other parts of the country. Pt. Nehru evolved a model of gradual development for NEFA in all respects as he had bitter experience in other tribal pockets of the country. The government launched a five-year plan, which broadly aims at increased productivity and reduction of inequalities.[13] For over all development of Arunachal Pradesh, a modest beginning was made through the first five-year plan in 1951, where a financial target of Rs. 300 lakhs was earmarked.[14] The first five-year plan was basically agricultural oriented although considerable emphasis was given on development of communications in the interior area. However, the Nehru-Elwin policy of gradual integration, cautious and slow pace of development had somewhat delayed the process of economic development. This is why, their model of development was largely abandoned after 1962 in favour of progressive politico-economic and cultural integration of NEFA in order to expedite the process of transformation of the traditional tribal socio-economic bases.[15] The subsequent five-year plans have taken up different thrust areas for economic growth and development of Arunachal Pradesh. It generated a process of transforming the traditional barter economy to modern monetary economy and it has brought far-reaching changes in the society as it has widened the economic opportunities.

Agriculture in Arunachal Pradesh is in the process of transformation from tradition bound shifting cultivation to settled modern type of cultivation. However, the topography and the environmental factors have greatly influenced the pattern of agricultural practice in the state. Slash and burn or jhum cultivation used to be the predominant form of cultivation among the Arunchalee till date. But the estimates suggest that the area under jhum is gradually declining, may be due the less or almost static productivity (See Table III.i). A shift towards settled cultivation has certainly undermined the popularity of the jhum cultivation because wet rice cultivation (WRC) sustains the productivity and there is less risk of crop failure as compared to shifting cultivation.[16]

Table 3.1: Area under jhum and permanent cultivation: Arunachal Pradesh

Year	*Settled Cultivation (%)*	*Jhum Cultivation (%)*
1970-71	5.73	94.27
1976-77	10.12	89.88
1980-81	15.49	84.51
1985-86	22.3	77.7
1990-91	28.0	72.0

(*Source*: Directorate of Agriculture, Government of Arunachal Pradesh.)

From the very beginning, government has given due attention to agriculture sector by carrying out both promotional and developmental works, so as to transform the traditional agricultural practices. The government thrust area has been on (a) encouraging the farmers to change over from shifting cultivation to settled cultivation, (b) popularizing the standard 'green revolution' package technology and (c) persuading the hill farmers to cultivate cash crops.[17] The work began with an initial outlay of Rs.106.98 lakhs during first five-year plan in agriculture and allied sector including horticulture and rural development. The outlays for agriculture and allied activities were subsequently increased as during eighth five-year plan, a sum of Rs.5, 027 lakhs were given. In spite of this, the growth scenario in agriculture sector is not encouraging in terms of productivity, diversification in cropping pattern in a meaningful way, use of non-traditional inputs and in terms of shift from jhum cultivation. In the region where wet rice cultivation is pre-dominant, people simultaneously go for cultivation of traditional crops in dry land so as to match their food habits as well as socio-cultural and religious significance of some crops like *Takhi* (ginger), *Dite* (local lotion), *Enying-Huse* (local *allu*), etc.

Analogous to all India experience, planning for development in Arunachal Pradesh in general and agriculture in particular is a top-down exercise. Despite the fact that there are directives and a philosophy for tribal development, which says, 'tribal should be developed along the lines of their own genius',[18] but the strategies and practices adopted are just contradictory. Agriculture practices, cropping pattern, technical know-how, etc. of other socio-cultural and climatic conditions were experimented in Arunachal Pradesh instead of putting efforts to innovate and streamline the indigenous knowledge system. In absence of this, people could neither identify their priorities nor appreciate the Govt. plan and programme which were aimed at agricultural development with a view to ameliorate their socio-economic conditions.

In fact, the tribal farmers have developed their own knowledge system over centuries together, which are compatible to their socio-cultural needs and eco-setting. Understanding their system from outside may be biased and misleading. For example, the jhum practice has been vehemently condemned for environmental degradation, whereas the system is quite eco-friendly as long as it is being practised within the framework of their tradition and custom, which are always determined by a strict sense of deterrent. The wrong perception of indigenous knowledge system and subsequent misinterpretation of outsiders raised doubt in the minds of the people especially among the educated group. In fact, there should be assimilation of both modern technology and indigenous technology. For example, in relatively plain areas and river valleys, modern irrigation system particularly minor irrigation programmes can be implemented in a large scale while, indigenous technology can be introduced in the hilly areas in order to increase the agricultural productivity.[19]

Due to lack of proper transportation and communication system, almost all tribes of Arunachal Pradesh were forced to confine to their remote villages till recently. Many people are yet to have access to the modern modes of economic activities. Nevertheless, there are a few Nyishis who have played a pioneering role in attaining self-sufficiency in economy. Shri Fee Namta was one of such persons who in early 1970's proved themselves to be pioneers in the transformation of agriculture from shifting cultivation to permanent wet rice cultivation, that too, in a remote place of Sarli under present Kurung Kume district. Fee Namta was a bonded labourer of one Shri Pisa Namta, who lives in Satu village. With his sincere and hard work, Fee Namta could be able to pay off the liabilities to his master, thereby relieved himself from the bondage. Once he came down to Ziro and subsequently to Lakhimpur in Assam for trying his luck. In these places, he saw for the first time, the permanent wet rice cultivation; at once he decided to go back to Sarli, to try the same. He started wet rice cultivation (WRC) that was truly successful and people wondered his new innovation and the achievement, they also soon followed his method. By the year 1977, Fee Namta was in possession of six acres of developed land for permanent cultivation and earned 40 quintals of rice annually, leading a happy family with his wife and four children.[20] Shri Tao Tana of Yazalee under Ziro Hq. was also one of such early Nyishis who became pioneer in horticultural works especially banana cultivation. He had successfully grown bananas in 10 acres of land along the riverbank of Panior. These bananas were supplied not only to the District Hq., Ziro but also to north Lakhimpur, Assam. His annual earning from banana alone was Rs.5000 during 1977.[21] Similarly in Nimte village under Sagalee circle, one Shri Nabam Taram successfully developed mini-orchard garden, where fruits of different varieties such as orange, pineapple, pears, plum, papaya, guavas etc are grown. He won a number of awards including national and state awards for his successful horticultural productions.

There is notable change in the property-rights structures. The traditional form of collective ownership of land and forest resources does not preclude the possibility of individual property rights in other assets and resources. The influences of increasing population, the market forces and the state intervention have necessarily changed the nature of the ownership rights over land and forests. Various developmental schemes initiated by the government have directly or indirectly encouraged the emergence of private properties. For example, encouragement for switching over from shifting cultivation to permanent cultivation, land-improvement grants, incentives for plantation and cash-crops and imparting training to individual farmers to acquire skills, have undoubtedly helped the formation of private property rights. However, the shortest and safest mode of earning private property among the people of Arunachal Pradesh is through contract works and through business operations. 'This neo-rich among the local communities have been able to acquire large pieces of land in the urban areas, near roads, for commercial purposes and in the remote areas for horticulture and tea gardens by taking permission and land-occupation certificates from the government, mobilizing outside labour for clearing forests and carrying out cultivation, and also by utilizing the traditional institutions and practices to their advantage.'[22]

The modern means of power and position in terms of knowledge, economic status, political influence and social status has undermined the traditional social structure. Consequently, there emerged a distinct type of social mobility in the society. The traditional Nyishi *Namchang* (settlement pattern) was primarily based on independent and scattered type, although they have frequent social interactions among the people living in same geographical regions. With the coming of modern development like roads, communication and most importantly the market forces, people have tendency of moving towards the possible accessible places. Hence, there is remarkable migration of people from rural to urban and semi-urban centres where they have modern amenities like school, hospital, social securities, so on and so forth. At the same time, efforts are being made to modify and redesign the traditional institutions and practices in order to suit the interest of the new emerging elites.

The growth of urban centres has leap up the market economy, which was uncommon in the traditional economic system. Interestingly, the growth of urban settlement in Arunachal Pradesh is not due to the outcome of complex interactions of internal socio-economic and demographic forces, which is generally found elsewhere, but it is the direct outcome and expansion of political and administrative development of the state. "These urban centres can be termed as 'induced' urban centres as opposed to the 'sequent occupance' of urbanization process of plain areas."[23] The history of urbanization in Arunachal Pradesh is not far to trace because we find that in the 1961 census, none of the places in Arunachal Pradesh fulfilled the criteria to be declared as urban centre. However, for the first time in 1971 census, four places namely Bomdila, Pasighat, Tezu and Along were included as census towns. Since then the number of urban centres has been increasing as there are as many as 17 urban centres as per 2001 census and correspondingly there were substantial growth of urban population.

Table 3.2: Growth of Urban Centres in Arunachal Pradesh

Census Year	*Total No. of Urban Center*	*Increased No. of Urban Center*	*Growth rate*
1971	04	-	00
1981	06	02	33.33
1991	10	04	40.00
2001	17	07	41.18

Sources:(1) Census of India, 1971, Arunachal Pradesh, Series – 24.
(2) Census of India, 1981, Arunachal Pradesh, Series – 25.
(3) Census of India, 2001, Aruachal Pradesh, Series – 13.

Table 3.3: Growth of Urban Population in Arunachal Pradesh

Census Year	*Total Population*	*Urban Population*	*Growth rate*
1971	467511	17288	3.7
1981	631839	41428	6.6
1991	864558	110628	12.8
2001	1091117	222688	2041

Sources:(1) Census of India, 1971, Arunachal Pradesh, Series – 24.
(2) Census of India, 1981, Arunachal Pradesh, Series – 25.
(3) Census of India, 2001, Aruachal Pradesh, Series – 13.

Economic diversification of Arunachal Pradesh can also be understood in terms of her economic potentials, as there are abundant natural resources like forest, mineral, power etc. Needless to say that in Nyishi belt no substantial progress is made in this field as there is no single industries (medium & heavy) located in the regions except a few ongoing power projects. Nevertheless, a few enthusiastic entrepreneurs are venturing for opening up of small industries like handloom and handicrafts. A variety of fashionable clothes, design of which is wedded with traditional outfit or values and to the taste of modernity, are being poured in the market. Women folk are engaged in such activities, many of who are now become not only self-sufficient but also becomes economic independent in the family. Handicrafts, especially the works on cane and bamboo are very popular among the Nyishis. Different design and style are employed to attract the consumer. This has also opened a new scope for earning money to sustain economic viability.

Livestock breeding has still an important area for economic sustenance among the people. In Nyishi society, a Mithun is the most valued domesticated animal. The importance of Mithun can be well realized with the fact that its price is frequently increasing by leaps and bounds. Haimendorf recorded in 1945, 'a Nyishi of Potin (name of village) paid 100 carrying baskets of unhusked rice for one large Mithun which corresponded then to Rs.400.' And in 1978-80, he said, 'Today prices are usually fixed in cash, and Mithuns are changing hands for as much as Rs.1500'[24], which was four times increase of the price prevailing in 1945. Within these two decades the price has increased drastically to whopping Rs.10, 000 to 15, 000, which is almost 100 percent increase of the price that prevailed during 1978-80. Similarly, the price of goat, pig, cow, buffalo, chicken etc. is also increasing substantially but the prices of these animals can be regulated by the Govt. as, now-a- days these animals are pouring in from plain area.

It may be mentioned here that, although there had been limited economic relations between the Nyishis and the plain dwellers but these were restricted to the people who were living in the peripherals or in the adjoining border regions. The majority of Nyishis were confined to their remote villages even during the initial years of independence. Access to the southern neighbours and subsequent mingling or interaction between them enabled the Nyishis to adopt new habits like chewing of betel nut & pan, smoking cigar or *biri*, *khainey* etc. which turns to be injurious to their health. Nevertheless, they could able to acquire some knowledge about education, health & hygiene, in a rudimentary form, as they do not have an access to formal education and training for the purpose. Within last two decades tremendous changes have been made so far as economic progress is concerned. However, only a few members of the society who are at the helms of the affairs are reaping these. Lots of private properties are coming up. The traditional valuable properties have now become showpieces and these are being replaced by landed properties, buildings, vehicles, cash and other comforts of the modern living style. With this outlook, the attitude of the people is also changing drastically. The days of simplicity, innocence, amiability, honesty, a sense of hospitality and humility has slowly been dooming and in its place cunningness, hypocrisy, crookedness, money minded, selfish or individualistic attitude have started reigning. Some writers have branded Nyishi as an individualistic tribe. But this was completely wrong and misnomer as the early Nyishis had never been like that. Actually, now only, a sense of individualistic approach to life is cropping up. The people are running after money and wealth, that too, by using unfair means.

Due to the lack of proper transportation, communication and required infrastructural facilities the economic development was very slow in the initial decades. But once these physical barriers and mental horizons are broken, there are substantial changes in the economic life of the people. Now, the people are increasingly realizing the fact that the economic progress is the cornerstone of all-round development of an individual, society, state and the nation. Many are acquiring and updating the knowledge about the economic efficiency and the art of good living. Haimendorf's words aptly sum up the economic development of the Nyishis:

> *What I saw then (1944-45) is today largely history, but there are occasions when anthropologists must take on the task of recording data which belong to a past age if they had the chance of living in such an age which many tribesmen of the present generation may not remember. The development which occurred in the 36 years which separate my first and last stay among Nyishi's were of such magnitude that in the more normal course of evolution even two centuries might not have brought about comparable changes. Indeed, I am convinced that Nyishi life as I saw it in the early 1940's resembled more closely with the condition of Nyishi in 1740 than that which prevails today among the Nyishis of the Subansiri District.*[25]

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4

EMERGENCE OF NYISHI IDENTITY

Introduction

'Identity politics', 'Identity claims' and 'Identity recognition' as the basis of the political movements have become the hallmark of the contemporary discourses. In North-East India, 'Ethno-Culture Identity' says A.C. Bhagabati 'has been an important source for mobilizing the people in socio-political spheres.'[1] In fact, identity movements may be 'viewed as a part of overall process of social change and modernization of tribesmen in north east India.'[2] In Arunachal Pradesh various small kinship based tribal societies are 'getting linked up to form larger ethnic units.'[3] In fact 'external factors of change' have substantially altered the traditional models of group identity and inter-group relations.'[4] Identities are never fixed by any essence[5] or essentialist criterion. Identity formation is a complex process. It is a historical process the character of which is determined by time and space.[6]

This chapter is a modest attempt to study the movement for emergence of Nyishi identity within the above broad framework. There are multiple factors for the emergence of Nyishi identity. The important factors are:

1. Educational Development.
2. Community Celebration of Festivals.
3. Cultural Tours.
4. Film Media.
5. Development of the concept of 'Otherness' and 'Difference'.
6. All Nyishi Youth Association.

7. All Nyishi Students' Union.
8. Nyishi Elite Society.

I

Educational development

The modern education has been the most viable agent for socio-cultural, economic, political and religious changes in Arunachal Pradesh. Prior to the dawn of modern education (literacy), the tribal worldview was invariably confined to their locality or neighbourhood. But with the spread of education the tribals have ample scope and opportunity to know and learn the various events that are taking place around them. As a matter of fact, education is vital to any comprehensive scheme of development; it is more so in Arunachal, where the tribes, excepting the Khamptis lacked a script.[7] The history of education (in term of literacy) in Arunachal Pradesh in pre-Independent India may be traced to 1918 when the local people at Pasighat opened the first venture school.[8] The second venture school was opened at Dambuk (Adi area) in 1922.[9] The medium of instruction in both the schools was Assamese. The people on experimental basis established these schools. But the colonial state had established only two primary schools[10] – one at Pasighat in present East Siang District and another at Sadiya, now in Assam. It is only in the post-Independent period, especially after 1950 that the Indian Government made keen efforts to establish schools in various parts Arunachal Pradesh.

From the very beginning the problem relating to the pattern of education and the medium of instruction cropped up in NEFA. It was in May 1953, the union cabinet finally decided that the type of education to be imparted must be in tune with practical needs and traditions of the people. The script shall be Devanagri of a simplified type and the medium of instruction shall be the tribal language as far as they would go and a switch over to Hindi when it is no longer possible to teach through the mother tongue of the pupils.[11] However, inspite of the clear orders of the government of India, the basic aim of promoting Hindi has not been entirely satisfactory. By introducing Hindi as a medium of instruction, the government of India intended to promote the feeing of national integration and enable the people to feel that they are Indian.[12] The government's language policy was ultimately vitiated due to continued pressure and virtual opposition from Assam. Government was facing practical problem as the teachers in NEFA who were drawn from Assam expressed their inability to teach in Hindi language as they had their education in Assamese medium.

So, the government decided to go for Assamese language as medium of instruction in NEFA. But in the later stage, this move was vehemently opposed by the local people. They were of the opinion that the medium of instruction should be based on all India pattern i.e. English as medium of instruction, whereas Hindi and Assamese may be taught as one of the subjects. The movement, which was spearheaded by students themselves, gained momentum and there was widespread response from the general people of the then NEFA. Finally, it was dropped and the Government opted for English as the medium of instruction.[13] Since then, literacy in Arunachal Pradesh has been progressing steadily. The figure shows that by the year 1971, there were 460 Lower Primary schools and a Higher Secondary school at every District Headquarters and Sub-Divisional Headquarters.[14] The following table brings out how the percentage of literacy in Arunachal Pradesh increased from mere 7.13 % in 1961 to 54.74 % in 2001.

Table 4.1: Showing literate population in number and percentage from 1961-2001

Year	*Total population*	*Literate population*	*Literate %*
1961	336558	24012	7.13
1971	467511	52791	11.29
1981	631839	131333	20.79
1991	864558	283610	41.59
2001	1091117	487796	54.74

(*Source*: Census of India, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001)

The higher education in Arunachal Pradesh was initiated in 1964 with the opening of an under graduate college at Pasighat. Since then the number of graduates has been steadily rising. The following table indicates the enrolment of students in Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat (the only college in the state at that time) increased from 37 in 1964-65 to 186 in 1975-76.

Thus, Arunachal Pradesh has been making its dent in the field of education as it is indicated in the tables.

Education among the Nyishis

Education has been one of the important factors in generating the consciousness among the Nyshis about the need to forge a unified

Table 4.2: Comparative District-wise Enrolment of Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat

Session	*Kameng*	*Subansiri*	*Siang*	*Lohit*	*Tirap*	*Total*
1964-65	2	2	23	6	4	37
1965-66	N	4	26	9	6	45
1966-67	N	7	52	9	3	71
1967-68	1	15	34	2	5	57
1968-69	N	10	45	2	6	63
1969-70	N	8	30	6	7	51
1970-71	1	13	31	9	9	63
1971-72	6	16	40	16	11	89
1972-73	8	17	64	13	9	111
1973-74	9	34	115	37	24	219
1974-75	7	40	126	30	24	227
1975-76	7	28	101	26	24	186

(*Source*: Arunachal News; Independent Day Number 1976, Vol. No.5; P.17)

Table 4.3: District-wise classified figures of Government run Educational Institutions as in 2004

State/ District	*Prepry.*	*Primary*	*Middle*	*Sec.*	*Hr. Sec.*	*College*	*University*
Arunachal	46	1277	326	104	67	07	01
Tawang	14	54	16	05	01	-	-
W/Kameng	NA	106	21	07	05	01	-
E/Kameng	01	105	21	05	03	-	-
Papum Pare	09	78	26	12	07	01	01
L/Subansiri	NA	114	34	12	05	-	-
U/Subansiri	NA	100	26	06	03	-	-
West Siang	13	160	50	13	08	01	-
East Siang	NA	96	26	08	08	01	-
Upper Siang	NA	49	10	02	03	-	-
Lohit	01	128	27	15	06	01	-
Changlang	NA	132	26	07	07	01	-
D/Valley	05	37	21	05	05	-	-
Tirap	03	118	22	07	06	01	-

(*Source*: Directorate of School Education and Higher Education, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh)

Note: W = West; E = East; L = Lower; U = Upper; and D = Dibang.

identity of the tribe. However, educational development has been very slow among the Nyishis in comparison with the other tribes of the state. The British officials except Dr. Haimendorf, did not venture into the Nyishi territory. The early NEFA officers too showed their lukewarm attitude towards this region on the pretext of the hostile nature of topography. This is why, the developmental process and for that matter the education was lagging behind in the region. The first school in the Nyishi belt was established only in 1948 at Doimukh. Gradually, though the number of schools sprang up, but the percentage of literacy in the districts inhabited by the Nyishis was much lower as compared to other districts of Arunachal Pradesh at the earlier stages of development of education as shown in the following table:

Table 4.4: Comparative literacy percentage of Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh/ Districts	*Total literate*	*1971*			*1961*		
		P	*M*	*F*	*P*	*M*	*F*
Arunachal Pradesh	Tota	5.20	8.72	1.70	2.51	4.62	0.41
	Rural	4.92	8.31	1.56	2.51	4.61	0.41
	Urban	34.85	46.82	19.22	...	...	...
Kameng	Total	3.26	5.18	1.31	1.98	3.43	0.54
	Rural	3.04	4.88	1.16	1.98	3.43	0.54
	Urban	33.00	41.91	22.37	...	...	...
Subansiri	Total	3.16	5.64	0.72	0.86	1.66	0.08
	Rural	3.16	5.64	0.72	0.86	1.66	0.08
	Urban	...	...	...	...	...	...
Siang	Total	7.71	12.91	2.61	3.69	6.87	0.52
	Rural	6.96	11.80	2.25	3.69	6.87	0.52
	Urban	37.09	49. 58	19.77	...	...	...
Lohit	Total	7.38	11.86	2.98	5.40	10.15	0.92
	Rural	7.27	11.72	2.90	5.40	10.15	0.92
	Urban	19.44	28.21	11.31	...	...	...
Tirap	Total	4.76	8.20	1.30	1.79	3.32	0.28
	Rural	4.76	8.20	1.30	1.79	3.32	0.28
	Urban	...	...	...	...	...	...

(*Source*: Census of India, 1971, Series No.24, Part II A, General Population)

Note: P = Persons; M = Male; F = Female.

Majority of the Nyishis were inhabited in the undivided Subansiri district and some were in undivided Kameng district. It is clear from the above table that the percentage of literacy was lowest in the Subansiri district as per the census reports in 1961 and 1971.

Nevertheless, a few Nyishi boys pursued their studies in Christian mission school at North Lakhimpur, Assam. According to Neelam Taram, 'Kholie Chiji was the first matriculate among the Nyishis, who passed in 1933 from Jorhat High School, while Samuel Narah and Bengia Rama did their matriculation in 1955 and 1964 from North Lakhimpur Mission School and Ziro High School respectively.'[15] The first graduate is Mr. Tedi Tana Tara, who acquired his degree in 1966 from Hans Raj College, Delhi and incidentally he is the first among the Nyishis to become Circle Officer in 1967. Similarly, the first Extra Assistant Commissioner from the community is Mr. Kapa Kholie, who had absorbed through direct recruitment in 1984. In the later part of 1970 and early part of 1980, a tremendous socio-cultural and educational awareness movement took place among the Nyishis. The former students had played a vital role in liaison with the concerned government agencies and the local people. Nabam Tana, once himself a student leader, reminiscences, 'The students' leaders stood firmly behind those who were willing to pursue their studies despite the fact that they were not allowed by their parents. Some time such youths, especially the girls were encouraged and induced to flee to the school for pursuing studies. Such students were taken care of by the students' union for some considerable period of time till their parents realized and accepted the responsibility. With the formation of larger representative students' body such as All Nyishi Students Union (ANSU), the movement got further streamlined and there are visible changes in this field.'

However, the direct involvement of students has adversely affected their career, as many of them could not be able to complete their studies. The problem of dropouts mounted and it has also affected the quality of education in the society. Early marriage is one of the most important cause of drop outs among the grown up youths, because once they got married they feel stigma for pursuing their studies. Nevertheless, the picture is slowly changing since the early part of 1990s and as such there is a substantial increase of educated people among the Nyishis. Even in the higher education the number of graduates from the community has been increasing steadily. (See table 4.5). The growth of education has enabled the Nyishis to create space for themselves in different category of government jobs and other occupations or professions too.

Table 4.5: Nyishi Officers in Group A & B Category

Profession/Dept.	*Class 'A' & equivalent*		*Class 'B' & equivalent*		*Total*	
					1994	*2004*
	1994	*2004*	*1994*	*2004*		
Engineer	06	13	32	66	38	79
Doctor	16	35	--	16	35	
Academician	02	11	42	85	44	96
Administrator	08	20	45	115	53	135

(*Source*: Computed on the basis of fieldwork)

The figure shows that within a period of ten years there is substantial increase in the absorption of Nyishis in group A & B category of government jobs, which infers that the education is growing steadily both in quality and quantity. The Nyishis are also making their presence in other sectors like business, private entrepreneurships, contractors, agriculture and allied activities. Some of them are also playing mature and conscientious leadership role in the political arena. The educated social group among the Nyishis has been playing a very significant role not only in bringing about a series of changes in the society but also is responsible for creating an awareness among the Nyishis to shed away their isolationist outlook and develop the feelings of brotherhood and a sense of Nyishi solidarity leading thereby to the process of forging Nyishi identity in the society.

II

Community celebration of Festivals

The other important factor in the development of the emergence of Nyishi identity is the celebration of festivals collectively by the community. The celebration of festivals provides them a sense of common identity since this creates the feeling of a shared history. It provides a common platform where the individual members of a community share their sense of joy. As we know the Nyishis inhabit vast hilly regions and their settlement patterns are scattered over reasonable distances. Because of these geographical barriers, they could hardly be able to interact, acquaint and even recognize the fellow Nyishis. It also put hurdles for developmental process in the region. On top of that, they were known by different names such as *Bangni* and *Yano* to the Nyishis of Kameng district, *Akang, Aya, Lali, Tagin Dafla*, and *Hill Miri* to the Nyishis of Subansiri region.

In this regard, the NEFA administration played a very important role. The government from the very beginning was apprehensive of the fact that the indigenous identity, culture, tradition and religion will disappear once outside culture and religion is allowed to intrude into the frontier. This is why the question of promotion and protection of tribal identity emerged in the minds of the administration. It seems that the administrators adopted two-pronged policy towards the tribes i.e. one through streamlining the development and administration, and other through protection, promotion and propagation of tribal culture and tradition. For administration, the pressing problems in those days were the settlement of different types of cases like marriage dispute, theft, murder, petty quarrels etc. The people sought quick solution to their vexed problems, which the administration was dispensing. On the other hand, the administrators called upon the people to identify themselves through their custom, tradition and culture. In the light of this an idea of community or tribal festival emerged.

It is noteworthy that every tribe has its own festivals or rituals, performed since the time immemorial as per the situation and requirement. But these were unorganized and limited to the locality, based on geographical contiguous region, although they belonged to the same tribal group. The transportation and communication bottleneck and lack of consciousness among the people were the major impediments to tribal development in NEFA. The people could hardly meet and interact with each other and did so also the government with the people. Hence, the idea of organizing community festival emerged purportedly to make it a common platform to get together and also to display the tribal socio-cultural ethos. There was wholehearted spirit of help and co-operation of both man and material from the administration, as initially the local people were practically not in a position to organize such a large-scale celebration. Since the later part of 1960's, the festivals sprung up, as almost all tribes of NEFA started celebrating their festivals.

The celebration of *Nyokum Yullow* was formally inaugurated in August 1967 at Joram village, 7 kms. away from Ziro, the District Headquarters of undivided Subansiri District. Shri Joram Begi one of the first generation intellectuals among the Nyishis, has reminiscences, 'The strength of the early *Nyokum* celebration lies on the senior students of Ziro High school like Bei Temi, Tadar Tang, Taw Pekhi, Chuku Talar, Nido Techi etc.' Late Dying Ering, the then Union Minister had always been closely associated with the festivals of different tribes of NEFA. In fact, he had been the champion of celebration of community festivals of the different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The administration gave substantial help and guidance as the Deputy Commissioner himself used to become the chairman for the celebration. However, since 1969, the *Nyokum Yullow* is celebrated annually in the month of February from 24th to 28th, the 26th being the sacrificial day.[16] Literally the term *Nyokum* is derived from two words 'Nyok' and 'um' - means 'earth' (home of living creatures) and 'gathering' respectively. The word *Yullow* can be understood as festival. Therefore, the compound word *'Nyokum Yullow'* is a conglomeration of all things on earth, to be precise the gathering of human beings in order to propitiate the innumerable *Weyis* (spirits) for the safety and security of mankind with all things needed for its well-being, peace, progress and prosperity.[17]

Besides ritual performances, the main attraction of the celebration include cultural programmes, literary activities, games and sports event, and of course a public meeting followed by community feast. The songs instilling the feelings of Nyishihood are composed and sung. Dances, dramas and comics are composed and performed during the celebration, which generate a consciousness of common identity among the Nyishis. In this way the community festival has ushered a new light, new zeal & enthusiasm, a new direction and united the Nyishis who have hitherto been scattered in the landlocked geographical region. *Nyokum Yullow* perpetuates worshipping of gods and goddesses to ensure that the entire humanity is well safeguarded against all evils - both natural and man made thereby, creates a balanced and congenial environment to provide sufficient materials of self-sustenance to the mankind. The festival represents the cultural specialties providing sustenance to it, and ultimately promotes continuance of custom, tradition and culture. It has provided a common platform to the Nyishis, bringing manifold aspects and diverse features of the Nyishi life style and unifying them like a bouquet of multi-coloured flowers.[18]

III

Cultural Tours

The NEFA administration used to organize 'Bharat Darshan Tour' every year for the people living in the remote and border areas of the Agency. The objective was to afford an opportunity for the people to see different parts of the country and have first hand information about the various national reconstruction projects and also to come in contact with the people living in other parts of India. Shri Nabam

Taram, who joined one of such 'All India Tours', narrated: 'I did not imagine that I could meet our brothers whom we had only heard from the mouth of our parents. We were eight members from our community (Nyishi) in the twenty-member team drawn from entire Arunachal Pradesh. Three were from present East Kameng district and five including me were from undivided Subansiri district. We (Nyishi) had long discourse on our genealogy and the process of migration during the journey. The trip, besides exposure to outside world, enabled us to understand ourselves and become closer.'

The students were also given such opportunity to move around the country so as to acquaint them with the changing scenario and to imbibe in them the feeling of patriotism, unity, integrity and national integration.[19] Therefore, objectively these cultural tours (Bharat Darshan Tours) played an important role in bringing the people of different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh on a common platform and in the process it also brought the different people from the same tribe together and thus creating an awareness of togetherness. Ultimately, this also was a factor in the process of forming a Nyishi identity.

IV

Film Media

The mass-media such as radio, television and films affect the minds of the people so intimately that through them the people could sense, as it were, a feeling of actual participation and involvement in the events. In the words of R.K. Chatterjee, "the activities of the mass-media follow closely the developments in various fields, informing people, reacting to policies and the social climate in which development and nation-building programmes can take place."[20] The film is one of the important elements of mass-media. It had also played an important role in creating new awareness among the Nyishis.[21] The screening of Hindi and Assamese films had practically transformed the people's mind set. Old films especially those based on freedom struggle and patriotic based had attracted and moved the people's mind and ultimately create awareness about the outside world. The launching of *Mera Dharam Meri Ma*, a first ever feature film produced in Arunachal Pradesh had greatly helped in creating awareness among the people. The film was based on the story of Nyishi joint-family system, blended with old tradition and emerging new changes in the society. This maiden film was produced and directed by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, a noted singer from Assam, while Mr. Nabam Tata, a Ziro High School student, who also incidentally played a lead role, wrote the story and script. The other main artists include, Joram Tajing, Ligang Tachang, Taw Tebin, Nabam Mekha etc. The then Chief Minister Shri P.K. Thungon attended the *muhurrot* ceremony of *Mera Dharam Meri Ma* at Yazalee on 13th May 1976.[22] Another documentary film based on 'Nyishi Marriage' was produced under the banner of 'Arunachal Film Society'. The language of the film was Nyishi with Hindi commentary, which was shot outdoors at Yazalee village with the local colour and exclusively performed by local artists. Shri R.N. Haldipur, the Lt. Governor of Arunachal Pradesh formally inaugurated the film on 2nd October 1980 at Itanagar.[23] The Department of Field Publicity vigorously used these films as a medium to educate the villagers in remote and far-flung areas. As the films mainly stressed the importance of modern education, it played a role of eye opener to the illiterate and backward people who are still reluctant to send their children to school. It also removed the physical barriers and confusion from the mind of the people about the outside world.

V

Development of the concept of 'Otherness' and 'Difference'

The meaning of the term 'other' signifies the various senses in different contexts. For instance, when we change the term of reference, the meaning of 'other' changes from one to another. In general view, the 'other' in social interaction may be defined as a social and political entity based on any or all of, language, religion, caste, class, gender, ethnicity etc. The 'other' are having solidarity of oneness. A common group feeling is formed on the basis of language, religion, or any criterion of the groups.[24]

Though, the concept of 'otherness' existed among the Nyishis vis-à-vis the Apatanis (immediate neighbours of Nyishis) earlier, but it was confined only to the Nyishis those inhabits surrounding the Apatani plateau. Haimendorf has rightly observed as early as in the middle of 1940s that, 'there has been a long drawn antagonistic relationship between the Nyishis and the Apatanis.'[25] This concept of 'otherness' was reinforced by certain episodes in the post-independent period and that has created a sense of 'Pan-Nyishihood'. In this context, intellectuals like Shri Joram Begi, opines, 'the attitude of our neighbouring tribe has also indirectly helped in awakening and posing unity among the Nyishis. Because of the indifferent attitude on the part of Apatani brothers, the Nyishi students of nearby Ziro areas preferred to go to Doimukh for their studies.' Similarly a sense of otherness also developed among the Nyishis and their neighbouring communities of Assam, such as Bodo, Karbi, Assamese, etc. There had been perpetual clashes along the border which had become a concern for the entire members of the community. The feeling of insecurity among the people of surrounding villages from the hands of their neighbours had also helped them to pose united and determined to stand together as a single community.

VI

All Nyishi Youth Association (ANYA)

Since late 1960 onwards, the number of Nyishi students started increasing and many of them had intrinsic zeal and interest in social service or community works. These students, under the banner of different students' body like Subansiri District Students' Union, Sub-Divisional and School Students' Union, played vital role of disseminating the knowledge about the fast changing development and modernity among the people. The student's movement has created tremendous changes in the society. Their activities included: physical works like construction of approach road, linking road, school building, community hall, etc., creating awareness among the people regarding education, health and hygiene, eradication of social evils and strengthening unity and integrity in the society. Different ways and means were adopted for the purpose. Bye-laws and resolutions, putting some terms and conditions were adopted. With the support and co-operation of the village head, panchayat members and the administration, sometime fine were imposed on those parents who refused to send their wards to school and similarly punishment and penalty were awarded to those who violated the rules and regulations framed for the welfare of the people.

In the middle of 1970's some senior and first generation students had dropped out from the schools mainly due to financial constraints and family liabilities. Since they were deeply involved in social and community works for a considerable period of time, they mooted the idea of forming an organization so as to continue their works. An organization initially called *Nyishi Dokum*, later on christened as 'ANYA' (All Nyishi Youth Association) was formally constituted in 1976 with Late Tadar Tang as Chairman, Mr. Bengia Tolum as Secretary, Mr. Danglo Sonam and Mr. Kameng Dolo as Executive Members. The main objective of ANYA were to conduct social service at remote and far flung areas, to organize cultural exchange programme in order to acquaint the Nyishis of different geographical region, to create awareness regarding the value of modern education, to eradicate social evils like child and forced marriage, superstitions etc., to promote and propagate the their rich tradition and culture and also to help the administration in implementing its developmental programmes. Shri Bengia Tolum, narrated:

'ANYA with its broad based objectives decided to send socio-cultural troupe to Daporijo and Seppa in 1976 & 1977 respectively. It may be mentioned here that the government through its social welfare wing, used to sanction some lump-sum amount for organizing social awareness campaign programme. For its Seppa programme, the government had sanctioned a sum of Rs.5000. The troupe finally set for Seppa in the last part of January 1977. The troupe led by myself (Tolum) included the following members: Likha Tangam, Joram Begi, T.C. Teli, Sulong Tajo, Mediram Dodum, Bengia Dipti and Teli Dimin. The team conducted three days social service and organized awareness campaign at Seppa, where we constructed an approach road in the town. The troupe also visited a few villages like Papu, Landang etc., organized cultural show and public meeting to create awareness among the people.'

With its formation and the positive role played, ANYA posed to be a representative body, especially in socio-cultural aspect of the Nyishis. In fact, ANYA had offered a platform for educated Nyishis to interact and march towards evolving a vibrant society. However, the achievement and euphoria of ANYA had proved to be short-lived as from the early eighties onwards it could not be able to stand firmly and show its vigour like during the initial years. The prime reasons were politicization of the organisation and over expectation from the Association. In January 1980, the Executive Body of ANYA was reconstituted, where once again Tadar Tang became Chairman while Kamen Rengu replaced Bengia Tolum as Secretary. But within a few months, differences cropped up among the members of the executive body over certain political issue. It had naturally affected and harmed the association thereby ANYA became defunct for all practical purposes.

VII

All Nyishi Students' Union (ANSU)

The next important organization that played a significant role in further developing the Nyishi identity is *All Nyishi Students' Union*. The students' bodies like All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union, Subansiri District Students' Union were already existed. Over the years the number of Nyishi students also started increasing but still it was very nominal in compare to other communities. Late Dera Natung, while tracing the history of formation of All Nyishi Students' Union, narrated:

'Talks had been going on since the middle of 1970's amongst the Nyishi students studying at Jawaharlal Nehru College, (JNC) Pasighat regarding the formation of an organization. But due to inadequate number of students it could not be given a concrete shape till the early 1980's. In those years some more students like Nabam Rebia, I (Dera Natung himself), Chuku Takar, Tab Jeel Tara and a few more had joined the college. In 1981, a remarkable incident occurred during the students' union election of the college. For the post of General Secretary, Mr. Nabam Rebia and Mr. Nani Rebia were in the fray. Nabam Rebia's victory was almost sure, as he was more popular and even more eloquent as compared to Nani Rebia. But in the election, to the surprise of many students, Nani Rebia defeated Nabam Rebia by a slender margin. Mr. Nani Rebia, an Apatani by tribe had played clandestinely a minority card and won the support of the students of other districts.'

It may be mentioned here that, a strained relationship between the Nyishis and the Apatanis had surfaced during this period over the issue of the latter's mass settlement in Naharlagun and Itanagar. Few straw incidents had led to a situation in which many Apatanis have to leave the capital complex but fortunately it did not turn into communal flare and the situation was put to normalize subsequently. However, the election episode at Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat had naturally given more fillips in creating the feeling of distrust and anxiety between the two communities. This incident had galvanized the emotions of the Nyishi students and hence, under the leadership of Mr. Nabam Rebia, they unanimously decided to form a community-based students' organization. The All Nyishi Students' Union (ANSU) was formally established on 28th January 1982 at Doimukh Hr. Sec. School. Shri Chuku Takar became the founding President while Shri Nabam Rebia became the founding Secretary. The immediate objectives were: to promote and protect the interest of Nyishi students', to stand for their right cause, to fight injustice, to work for the overall up-liftment, unity and integrity of the community. Subsequently, there have been substantial and comprehensive additions of the objectives, drawn up in the meetings and conferences of ANSU.

The awareness campaign has been one of its most important objectives as it has far reaching impact on the society. Though ANSU has been primarily championing socio-cultural emancipation of the people yet it has also stood against the wrong policy of the government from time to time. One such striking example can be cited in the case of the transfer of Raga Administrative Centre to Upper Subansiri District in 1988-89.[26] The ANSU had also played a positive role for restoration of Raga Administrative Centre to Lower Subansiri District. The movement was spearheaded by ANSU under the banner of JACRAC (Joint Action Committee on Restoration of Raga Administrative Centre).[27] A special mention may be made of Shri Bengia Tolum, Chairman JACRAC and Shri Takam Sanjoy, Member Secretary JACRAC and also a President of ANSU, who gave able, distinct and conscientious leadership to the movement. The struggle continued for about six months, the modus operandi of which were bandh call, demonstration and boycott of the government functions and holding public meetings in the affected areas. It had generated widespread response among the people as the government action was malicious in nature and intended to create division among the Nyishis. The attention of the central government too was drawn on this issue, as the attitude of the state government was quite adamant and rigid. Since the movement was so spontaneous and gained strength that the government ultimately had to concede to the demands of the people.[28] Shri Nera Techi, former ANSU President puts, 'in its long span of 20 years, ANSU has witnessed lot of ups and downs but still it could be able to maintain its core objective of uniting the people especially the growing youths of the society.' He further asserted, 'the power and strength of ANSU can well be realized with the fact that it is placed in the category of one of the strongest students' bodies in the North East and for that matter even in India.'

VIII

Nyishi Elite Society (NES)

As ANYA became virtually defunct organization, the Nyishis were deprived of a proper forum to interact among themselves and also to ventilate their grievances. Adding to this, there was completely indifferent attitude on the part of the political leadership towards the problems of growing up youths. The frustration mounted especially among the educated people as many of them were deprived of their desired or qualified privileges and opportunities. There was no proper plan and programme for the development of the Nyishi inhabited regions. On top of that the Nyishis were being divided on the line of petty politics. In such situation, the sensible and like-minded educated

Nyishis seriously thought in terms of evolving a platform basically to work for the cause of the community. The series of meetings and interactions ultimately paved the way for the formation of *Nyishi Elite Society* on 11th September 1987 at Imdad Bhawan, Naharlagun. The first executive body was constituted with Joram Begi as President, late Dera Natung and Tana Rekhi as Vice Presidents West and East respectively, Techi Nyokum as Secretary and a few others as executive members. The main objectives of NES include:[29]

1. To promote and foster fraternity, integrity and to create a sense of belongingness among the Nyishis in particular and the people of Arunachal Pradesh in general.
2. To create awareness among the Nyishi people enabling them to cope with the changing time and pace of development.
3. To prevent the Nyishi people from being divided in the name of religion, region, class, clan etc.
4. To imbue a rational, scientific and dynamic culture of the people.
5. To eradicate and reform the prevailing age-old social evils so as to build a refined and scientific society.
6. To endeavour and explore the ways and means to uplift the socio-economic status of the people.
7. To render humanitarian and social welfare services to the needy people like the poor, destitute, handicap and so on and so forth.

The launching of *"Komchi Lella"*, a first ever audio cassette in Arunachal Pradesh was the first major works of NES. Professor C.L. Anand, the then Vice-Chancellor of Arunachal University, Doimukh formally released it on 14 November 1989.[30] The title of the cassette 'first ray of the sun' itself is an inspiring and scintillating for all. It is two volume cassettes comprising of twenty-four songs including four folk songs. The artists were having inborn quality, who without access to training and guidance, gave the entire components including music of each song to the taste of the people. They include - Bengia Tabb, Nabam Bijno, Chuku Nayo, Taba Yal, Nabam Tata, Nabam Pekhi, Taw Tebin, Kabak Nachu, Chera Tayum and Nabam Mekha. A few of these songs are:

Kuju kuju gorabto ngulu nyishi tudihe
Kuju ngulu nyishi yamihe
Menyia laju melange ngul ateg nyoku gab
Sanyia laju melange ngul ateg ishi gab

Nyoke tasa sujakam ngul hange pekinla-haa
Ishie hosa sujakam ngul riole dakinla
Agame lusa lusa jakam riole dasa dasa jakam
Ngul Tani ko akin ne
Diba diya log nyok yortam kate-laa
Tudi kumki rumre mabeju ngule
Seba saa log isi hotam kate-laa
Yami chochi rore mabeju ngul
Sol ngul lekin gobeju

(Gist: Nyishi youths, let's arise, awake and march ahead for the cause of society. Though we may be living in different regions and have differences in our phonetic accent but we are all the same as we belong to same forefather-Abo Tani. By seeing the 'high peak' and 'mighty river' we should not be scared of and feel nervous. Problems or difficulties of any magnitude can be overcome, if we are united together. So, let's stand together, think and work for the society.)

Another song which deserves mention here is very significant from the point of view of our theme and is metaphorical:

Ngage ebi bor tulung ngalo
Ngage enyi barm tulu ngalo
Senam donyiam tame mitado
Ngulu nyishi nge ham cheng kuma
Lepe pebe darde ku
Pengu pebe darde ku
Hiye kulayu sam tudi bo si
Hiye kulayu sam riangdi bo si
Nyecha lecha jakam ngul nyishi nge
Jenge yuma jakam ngul nyishi nge
Ateg nyetu ngam hengab laju
Ateg potu ngam hengab laju

(Gist: Our brothers and sisters, the 'rising sun' is going to be swallowed by 'sun eater'. But we are not aware of this. The guardian of society is dying. Who will save her/him? Despite all handicaps, we ourselves must stand together to protect and promote the society.)

This song is based on the mythology and the sun is personified as guardian of society while the sun eater represents sorrow, misery, distress, ignorance, illiteracy, disunity etc. The cassette also contains some songs, which provide a critique of the political leadership of Nyishi community. To cite one of these songs:

Pebe page bo gora abe si
Pumbh Takhe richi yoma tel
Jene dane domre tolo lepe pebam techi yoma tel
Chetu dargub darge geyi ku deha bargub barge geyi ku
  Ache amin ne nyirji geyiku
  Gumgu moyo nge kaji geyiku
  Nerme ngage gaml toname pisu tamub judeku
  Rialo ngage roil sehname oho dimar takar jupa deku
Nyikum ko sinyi pebe padi boe
Nyia ko sinyi riole sedi boe
Hogab ngule pudu rutu ngam ruki kulaju
Namtu rongo mele ngam oh ngule roki sula kuju

(Gist: Those who are at the helm of affairs are showing indifference to the community, as they do not deserve to represent the community. That is why, all creatures, including birds and animals are laughing at us. The works carried out by them are now redundant and these are flying in the air like dust. We must realize we Nyishis are having calibre and potential in encountering any problem and can compete with others. We must use it properly and enable the society to thrive.)

These songs may be interpreted in different ways but the central theme was to awake the people who are almost marooned in the midst of backwardness, illiteracy, ignorance, innocence, disunity and above all unknown to one another. The songs could ably instill emotions in the minds and hearts of the people especially the young generations and that have immensely helped in creating consciousness among the Nyishis. As Bengia Tabb, one of the artists put "the appreciations for the success of the cassette poured in not only from the people of Nyishi community but also from the people of other communities accrossed."

Since its inception, NES never looked back, and continued addressing general and important issues of the society and always stood for the unity and integrity of the community. In this regard, a major break-through was made when one branch of Nyishis, living in Upper Subansiri and Lower Subansiri Districts (who were known as

Hill Miris), decided to affirm themselves as original Nyishis at a mammoth gathering on 19th December 1999 at Ligu village in Upper Subansiri District. (See appendix – G). NES did not confine its activity to the socio-cultural amelioration of the society but also kept vigil over the political fall out in the state. The NES along with its youth or students organization - ANSU had displayed its role and impact in the politics of the state. In January 1999, NES and ANSU jointly asked its ministers to quit their office for what they called the apathetic and intolerable attitude of the then state government to the demands of the community.[31] In clear response to the call, the ministers resigned en masse from the ministry.[32] This was followed by the resignation of other ministers from different communities that paved the way for the fall of Arunachal Congress government led by Mr. Gegong Apang in the state and subsequently Mr. Mukut Mithi formed the INC government with the support of the belligerent ministers and legislators.[33] But, alas! Many wills and aspirations of the people are yet to be fulfilled.

The NES has also been taking up social and ethnic issues. There were strained relationship between the Bodos of Assam and the Nyishis over few years. The Nyishis living along the Assam-Arunachal boundary areas were subjected to kidnap, torture and extortion allegedly by Bodo outfits. Consequently, the Nyishis under the banner of Nyishi Elite Society called for voluntary social boycott of all Bodo communities working in Arunachal Pradesh. After having a number of preliminary talks between the two communities, a historic summit called 'Bodo-Nyishi Peace Summit' was conducted at Itanagar on 11th April 2002 (See appendix – H). Nyishi Elite Society and All Nyishi Students' Union represented the Nyishis while Bodo Sahitya Sabha and All Bodo Students' Union represented the Bodos. The elected leaders of both the communities were also involved in the talks. With the signing of this agreement there is perceptible change of positive environment along the borders. However, there are some critics who alleged that the NES is a communal organization as it is based on one community. In his Presidential address at Palin conference, Shri Joram Begi, President NES clarified that:

> *Since the society is working for the well being of the Nyishi community alone, it may look like a communal organization. But our critics should know that more than 1/4th of the population and territory of Arunachal Pradesh is of the Nyishi community and the Nyishi community is the most backward community in the state. If this backwardness remains in the community and in the region, it*

will not only create regional imbalances but also create social tension amongst the people. As such it would not be in the interest of the state and of the nation to leave this vast community and the region backward. Hence, the NES is working to put the community on equal footing with the other people. It has not done any harm against any other community to be alleged as a communal organization. Of late, certain new issues have cropped up in our community – the issues of religion, region and party politics. The NES must rise above all such sectarian, partisan and regional level and continue its efforts to unite the community as the most cohesive and upcoming community in the state.[34]

To sum up, there are number of factors which were responsible for the emergence of Nyishi identity. Education has created new social groups or intellectuals and in turn these groups spearheaded the movement for consciousness about the common identity as Nyishis. The socio-cultural awareness movements have been carried out by forming different forums and organizations. Organizations such as ANYA, ANSU and NES had played and have been playing decisive role in forging a common identity. Once, Haimendorf commented, 'Compared to the progress of most tribal communities in Peninsular India this is an admirable achievement, and there can be little doubt that Nishis (now Nyishis) like other tribesmen of Arunachal Pradesh are set on a road to rapid social and political development,'[35] He further said: '... the Nyishis are numerous enough to play an important role in a system where the number of votes counts for as much as commercial success'.[36]

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34. Presidential Address at 6th General Conference of Nyishi Elite Society at Palin in Kurung Kume District, from 11th to 114th January 2001.
35. C.V. Furer-Haimendorf, *Highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh, op. cit.* 1982, p. 124.
36. *Ibid.*

5

EMERGING CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Introduction

The Indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh have been maintaining their age-old religious traditions since the time immemorial. The neighbouring rulers, be it Ahom or British had not dared to interfere and impose outside religions, despite the fact that they had patronized religions in the plains. In fact, the tribals could be able to preserve their customs, traditions, faiths and practices mainly because they practically remained separated and later on put up in a state of complete isolation. Even during the initial years of independence, the similar situation prevailed as the government envisaged a policy of 'protectionism' towards the people of the then NEFA. However, gradually the changes emerged owing to the developmental activities initiated by the government. This state induced changes opened up a pandora box for inflow of the modernity, modern ideas and religion especially the Christianity which can be visible since the early part of 1960's. In this chapter an attempt has been made to study the emergence of Christianity in Nyishi areas leading to the formation of new religious identity. It is divided into the following sections:

1. Christianity in North East India.
2. Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh.
3. Christianity among the Nyishis.
4. Anti-Christian activities.
5. Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religious Act 1978.
6. Impact of Christianity among the Nyishis.

I

Christianity in North East India

Christianity was first founded in Indian sub-continent at the southern state of Kerela by St. Thomas, one of the apostles (one among the 12 disciples) of Jesus Christ in 52 A.D. Nevertheless, it took nearly 1600 years to reach in the soil of North East India. It was in 1626 that two Jesuit missionaries namely Frs. Stephen Cacella and John Cabral reached Pandu near present Guwahati, probably on their way to Tibet and China.[1] There are also references to the visit of a Feringhi and four Europeans in the Ahom kingdom in 1635 and 1739 respectively.[2] But unfortunately the details of their visits are not available. Milton Sangma in his book *History of American Mission in North East India* referred to a chronicle of the Augustinian Friars of Bandel in Bengal, which mentioned that in 1682 about 7000 Christians were flourishing in a place called Rangmati in Lower Assam. The Chronicle further recorded that in January 1715, Bishop F.T. Laynez of S. Tome Mylapore spent 25 days at Rangamati and confirmed at least 1000 Christian population there.[3] Technically, we may say that Rangmati was the first place where Christianity entered into the North East Region. Bondashill, situated in the left bank of the Barak river under Cacher District in Assam was the next place where Christianity could exert influence in the region. The inhabitants once migrated from Merut in present U.P. at the wee hour of Mughal rule in India. They were the Roman Catholic of Portuguese origin and were basically sent by the Mughals to fight against the British. But in 1765 when Bengal and Sylhet were brought under the British dominion, these people took refuge in the kingdom of Raja of Cacher, where they were allotted to settle in this Bondashill.[4] From the above facts it is clear that among the foreign missionaries, the Roman Catholics were the first to enter into this region.

However, with the foundation of Serampore Mission in 1793 by the Baptist Missionary Society of England, the missionary activities first set in motion. The Charter Act of 1813 formally permitted the missionaries to preach the Gospel in India and it had emboldened them to expand missionary activities.[5] William Carey, who closely associated with the Serampore Mission, founded the Serampore College in 1818 A.D. The institute soon became a nodal centre for academic as well as missionary works. It was on the suggestion of W.N. Garret, a Judge at Sylhet, Carey prompted to send one Krishna Chandra Pal, a first Serampore convert to undertake the work of evangelization among the Khasi refugees, who had probably fled from their native hills in order to escape inter-tribal feuds. K.C. Pal, accompanied by Gora Chand, a local Christian as his assistant, arrived Sylhet on 20th March 1813 and from there they moved to Pandua, a foothill area near Cherrapunjee.[6] K.C. Pal stayed there for about eight months and administered baptism to four Sepoys, two Khasis and one Assamese. But despite his fullest effort the mission proved to be short-lived as it could not able to establish a regular missionary centre and even it utterly failed to create enthusiasm among the local people. Despite the failure in his first attempt, William Carey did not get disheartened. His plan of expanding towards the east became more realistic with the formal annexation of Assam (includes all north east regions) by the Britishers in 1826 A.D. With the initiations of William Carey and David Scott, the Serampore Mission opened a mission centre at Guwahati in 1829 A.D. James Ray, a first missionary to this mission centre, reported in 1830 that he had under his charge twelve interesting youths – three Khasis and nine Garos, and also informed that many were willing to accept Christianity but could not openly confess due to fear of persecution and social ruin.[7] But this mission also failed to make much headway and later on Ray himself left the missionary works to take up the educational work under the British government.

In the meantime, the American Baptist Mission Home Board was eagerly looking for a passage to enter China for evangelization. The government was under pressure to impart education and other related social services to the people. Hence, they looked upon the missionaries for these works. This is why, in 1835, Captain Jenkin invited the American Baptist Mission in Burma to work among the Shans in upper Assam.[8] While accepting the government invitation, American Baptist Mission sent its two missionary families from Burma mission centre to open mission centre at Sadiya in upper Assam. The families of Nathan Brower and Oliver Cutter reached Sadiya on 23rd March 1836 and opened the centre. It may be mentioned here that in those periods the situation at Sadiya tract was not favourable for missionary works as there were constant raids and clashes from the Shan tribes i.e. the Khamptis and the Singphos who settled around the tract. However, the Home Board had made up its mind to establish Shan mission and hence, without second thought the mission centre was opened at Sadiya. The driving motive for the American Baptist Mission to open a centre here was of course not their desire to expand in the North East Region but their long cherished desire of entering into Northern Burma and China. Nevertheless, with the opening of mission centre at Sadiya, a humble beginning was made in both evangelization and education. A few schools were opened but to the surprise of the two missionary families, the Shan populations were negligible and inaccessible too, as many of them still treated the Europeans or outsiders as their enemy. In this way, their prime purpose of acquainting and evangelizing the Shan tribe through their language and socio-religious interaction could not be materialized.[9]

At this juncture, the British Missionary Society had offered its lower Assam field (Brahmaputra valley) to the American Baptist Mission Society. The Home Board had already expanded the mission fields beyond its capacity; they could not afford to maintain two mission fields in Assam. Finally, they had decided to give up the Shan mission and took up the new mission at lower Assam in 1841 A.D. The non-conducive atmosphere due to the inhospitable behaviour of the Shan tribes was the main reason for the abandonment of this mission. However, Bronson and his family already opened an extended field at Jaipur in 1837-38. They had initially shown an interest to work on the Singphos and the Nagas of adjoining hills but this too, could not flourish and was also later on abandoned.[10] The new lower Assam mission-centre was formally launched on May 24, 1841 at Sibsagar as its Headquarters. Mr. and Mrs. Berker, who were soon joined by the Brown family and Miles Bronson, manned it. With their joint efforts, a humble beginning was made in the missionary works especially in the field of education. From the mission centre the missionaries were sent to different parts of the region for spreading both evangelization as well as education. It was the conviction of these early missionaries that the schools became tools for their efforts to mould the mind of the people and thereby bring substantial change in them. One of their main thrust areas was the translation of local languages and the publication as well as circulation of the gospel materials among the people. Gradually, the Baptist mission extended mission centres and schools to the tribal hills like Garo hills, Jayantia hills, Khasi hills, Mizo and Manipur hills and later on to the territory of present Arunachal Pradesh.

The Roman Catholic Mission started its work in India since the fifteenth century onwards. But till nineteenth century this mission had only occasional contact with the northeast region. Initially this region was placed under the Diocese of Mylapore, which extended from present day Tamil Nadu all the way to the Burma border. In 1834, Pope Gregory XVI divided the Mylapore Diocese by creating the Vicariate Apostolic of East Bengal and the North East was brought within the newly bifurcated Vicariate Apostolic of Lhasa. But within twenty years it was brought back under Bengal in 1856 A.D. There was no remarkable expansion of missionary works prior to 1890 A.D. The official establishment of the Catholic mission in northeast India started with the arrival of the Salvatorian Fathers in 1890.[11] The missionary activities gained little momentum with the formal conversion of a first Khasi to the Catholicism in 1891 A.D. Subsequently, the mission centres were established at Shillong (1890), Raling (1892), Shella (1893), Cherrapunji (1897) and a number of schools were also established simultaneously.

The mission gained strength when it was joined by Fr. Christopher Edmund Becker in 1906 A.D.[12] He took up the task of opening schools for the local and poor people. The missionary activities were seriously disrupted during the First World War as Germany was actively involved in the war. But it gained momentum again with the arrival of eleven missionaries in January 1922 at Shillong.[13] And since then the Catholic missions entered into a period of stability and expanded its activities throughout the region. Later on a group of Silesians Sisters also arrived and began their significant educational cum medical services for the downtrodden and needy people. After the Second World War and subsequent Indian Independence the expansion and growth was still rapid and remarkably extended to almost all parts of the region. At present there are three Archdioceses and seven dioceses in the region.

Besides the two major denominations, there are many Christian Churches spreading over the region. These churches include- Anglican Church, Seven Days Adventists, Revival, Pentecostal, Welsh Calvinist, Presbyterian and also some Churches of Indigenous origin like Church of God, Church of God-Ecclesia, Christ National Church, the Assembly of Churches of Jesus Christ, All-in-Christ Church Fellowship and the Unitarian Church.[14]

II

Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh

The early Christian contacts with the people of Arunachal Pradesh were basically from two strategic places i.e. Sadiya and Lakhimpur, both in present Assam. It may be mentioned here that the foreign missionaries including the Roman Catholic and American Baptist Mission were primarily looking for a passage to enter into the soil of China and South East Asia. The Home Board of American Baptist Mission had been a long cherished wish of introducing Christianity among the Shans in the North East, and through them to enter into China by inland routes as her sea ports were then closed to the foreigners. However, the ongoing raids and warfare of the rebels of Khamptis and Singphos were vitiating their maiden attempt of evangelization and imparting basic education. Their efforts were finally shattered by the unprecedented massacre inflicted by the Khamptis at Sadiya town on 28th January 1839 A.D.[15] After this incident, Sadiya practically became depopulated as the offended Khamptis were dispersed to five different places and the Singphos too, also slowly migrated towards the hills. The changed situation and the impending bleak future of the mission compelled the American Baptist Mission to give up the Shan mission in 1841 and decided to take up the new mission in Lower Assam. It may be mentioned here that prior to the arrival of American Baptist Missionaries in Sadiya, the British Baptist Mission and Serampore Mission were already preaching gospel in Lower Assam but without much success. The Roman Catholic missionaries also entered into the hills and had brief contact with the Adis (Abors) and the Mishmis in 1840 and 1854 respectively. The Mishmis murdered, cold-bloodedly the two French Catholic missionaries namely Fr. Krick and Fr. Bourry when the duo was on their way to Tibet.[16]

The Sadiya mission station was re-opened in 1905 after a gap of about 66 years, with new object and purpose of evangelizing the Miri and Abor tribes.[17] The missionaries brought out a literature on dictionary of the Abor-Miri language. The schools were also established for providing education to the Abor and Miri children. But the missionaries could not make much headway primarily because these hills lie inside the inner line boundary. Nevertheless, the missionary began its activities among the hill tribes from Sadiya as a Mission Centre. Rev. C.E. Petrick assumed the charge of new mission at Sibsagar in 1889 A.D.[18] He, along with his wife had intrinsic zeal and interest in expanding the missionary activities. He sent missionaries to different places from the headquarters. His initial attempt to establish links with the north Lakhimpur field in 1890-92 did not bear much fruit. However, he persuaded the Home Board to appoint separate missionary for this field. Rev. John Firth was designated as a first and independent missionary who started the mission centre in December 1893 A.D.[19] Soon after the establishment of mission centre at Lakhimpur, John Firth toured entire region. He soon encountered the tribe such as Daflas (Nyishi), Miris, Abors etc. who dwell along the foothills and realized that there is a prospect of missionary works among these tribes. Hence, he pleaded the authority to depute separate missionary for them, to which a Garo young man, Tosin by name was sent in 1898, especially to work among the Daflas and the Miris.[20] It is to be noted that, John Firth had formally founded the Lakhimpur Field and he along with his wife and few missionaries had rendered their valuable services for about three decades. That is why in recognition to his contribution, later on Lakhimpur Mission School was named after him as John Firth Mission School. This school had practically become a nerve centre for missionary activities especially in the Subansiri belt of Arunachal Pradesh.

The spread of Roman Catholic Church among the Arunachalee tribes slowly began with the foundation of mission centres/schools along the borders. With the opening of mission centre with schooling facility at Tezpur in 1934, there was a spurt in the missionary activities and it also added thrust to open and develop new mission stations in other parts. North Lakhimpur was one of such venture which was opened in 1944 A.D.[21] Despite their consistent attempt to extend their activities towards the Arunachalee tribes, the result was not encouraging, may be because Arunachal being a closed territory, the outsiders including the missionaries were not freely allowed to enter. But gradually their scheme of spreading Christianity gained a little success by way of imparting education at the mission schools. This process gained momentum after the foundation of mission school at Harmutty near Doimukh in 1977 A.D.[22] Many tribal boys and girls flocked into this school as it basically imparts free-education. Besides teaching general subjects, the students were also taught on Christianity and when they came back to their villages they started preaching Christian religion.

Table 5.1: Christian population (in %) in North East India

State	*Population in lakhs & %*	*Christian population in Lakhs & %*	*Tribal population in lakhs & %*
Assam	198.97	3.81 (1.97 %)	73.61 (37 %)
Arunachal Pradesh	6.32	0.30 (4.3 %)	5.81 (82 %)
Manipur	14.21	4.20 (29.7 %)	4.6 (32 %)
Meghalaya	13.36	7.00 (52.6 %)	10.82 (81 %)
Mizoram	4.94	4.00 (82.8 %)	4.70 (95 %)
Nagaland	7.75	6.20 (80.2 %)	6.74 (87 %)
Tripura	20.53	0.23 (1.21 %)	5.33 (26 %)
Total	266.08	25.81 (9.70 %)	100.95 (41.70 %)

(*Source*: Census of India 1981)

Table 5.2: Religious composition in the North Eastern States

State	*Hindus*	*Muslims*	*Christians*	*Sikhs*	*Others*
Assam	67.13	28.43	3.32	0.07	1.05
Arunachal Pradesh	37.04	1.38	10.29	0.14	51.15
Manipur	57.67	7.27	34.11	0.07	0.88
Meghalaya	14.67	3.46	64.58	0.15	17.14
Mizoram	5.05	0.66	85.73	0.04	8.52
Nagaland	10.12	1.71	87.47	0.06	0.64
Tripura	68.50	7.13	1.68	0.03	4.66

(*Source*: Census of India, 1991: Religion – Paper 1 of 1995, xiv-xxii)

The census reports of 1981 and 1991 shows substantial growth of Christian population in the North East and in Arunachal Pradesh itself it rose from mere 4.3% in 1981 to 10.29% in 1991.

III

Christianity among the Nyishis

There had been long traditional relationship between the plain dwellers and the Nyishis of foothill regions. Their relationship was limited to petty economic transaction through barter system and the appropriation of Posa payment. The relation neither led to social admixture nor to religious influence upon the Nyishis. But with the advent of British in Assam and the subsequent entrance of Christian missionaries in the entire northeast India, a new shape emerged among the indigenous people in the field of religion. The interaction between the Nyishis and the missionaries can be traced from the foundation of the mission station at North Lakhimpur. John Firth, the founder of the mission centre asked the authorities to depute separate missionary for the Nyishis; consequent upon which in 1898 the Garo Church sent a missionary (Tosin by name), exclusively for the Nyishis and other adjoining tribes. Unfortunately, there are no records revealing the works of this missionary who reportedly stayed till 1905 A.D.[23] While referring to the early indigenous conversion to Christianity, Milton Sangma, made mention of a Nyishi (Dapla) young man formally converted to Christian fold as early as 1900 A.D.[24] but his name and details are not available. It is observed that despite the repeated attempt of the missionaries for evangelization among the tribals, there was no taker at least in the beginning. Although they received medical assistance, as many of them were prone to different types of diseases, but usually they refrained from formal conversion to Christianity.

While dealing the early history of Christianity among the Nyishis, Shri Neelam Taram, a prominent Nyishi intellectual and himself a Christian, revealed that one Nara Sensu of Rongajan was the first Nyishi to embrace Christianity in 1920 A.D.[25] Shri Tayi Bate, reminiscences that 'it was two people by name Tabia Begi and Chemir Ekhin who were first converted to Christianity.' In 1926 the General Association of Garo Church sent Rev. Dinanath Marak to work in Nyishi mission. He baptized five Nyishis and eleven Miris in 1931.[26] Shri Khoda Tana, while narrating his early Christian life made mention of one Kholie Chiji, son of Kholie Tai as his early known Christian convert among the Nyishis. Shri Neelam Taram and Shri Tayi Bate also confirmed that Kholie Chiji was the first educated Nyishi, who did his matriculation in 1933 from Jorhat Christian High School. He formally converted to Christianity in 1937 A.D. He had served as teacher cum warden at John Firth Mission School in North Lakhimpur. At mission school, he practically became a friend, philosopher and guardian of the early Nyishi students who had come there for studies. Later on, he was ordained as deacon of Lakhimpur region but he confined his activities in the foothills only. His brother, Kholie Lezee, son of Kholie Lely was also one of the early Nyishi converts who had served as hostel warden at the same mission school. These two brothers have greatly influenced the Nyishi students and in turn through these students, gradually the Christianity intrudes into the Nyishi community. Next important person was Kop Temi who lived at Rangajan in Assam - Arunachal boundary. In the words of Tayi Bate, "though Temi did not play an important role as Christian leaders did, he played a vital role of assisting or helping as an interpreter to the British officers including Furer H. Haimendorf in 1944-45." Since the NEFA was an enclosed area, the entries of outsiders including the missionaries were subjected to strict scrutiny. Even the early Nyishi converts were also not allowed to move freely inside the Nyishi inhabited areas. Once in 1952, Kholie Chiji and Kholie Lezee were arrested and put behind the bar at Doimukh at the order of Circle Officer. The only possible reason was that they were preaching gospels among the people.

Shri Tayi Bate is the first formal apostle (preacher) among the Nyishi community. He was ordained as the first Deacon for NEFA in 1959 by North Lakhimpur Baptist Christian Association. Born in 1930, Shri Bate originally hails from Duria village (now does not exist) in present Itanagar. His father died when he was only a small child. Due to economic hardship, he fled to his maternal uncle's place at Cher (now where he is living) via Harmutty in 1944 A.D. He got admitted at Rongajan Christian Mission School in 1947 but he could continue his studies only up to IVth standard, as he could not get financial support and proper guidance. It was in this school that he got attracted to this new religion and he formally got converted in 1948 A.D. Even after leaving the school, he continued to attend church services and took part in the Christian conventions and conferences. It was because of his keen interest in the new religion, the Association had decided to sponsor him for undergoing Bible Training Course at Bishwanath Chariali near Tezpur in 1958 A.D. After the successful completion of the training, he was ordained as Deacon and thus he began his gospel activities slowly and steadily inside the Nyishi belt.

By this time a number of Nyishis had already been attracted to this new religion and a few of them have formally converted to Christianity. The Nyishi students, studying at John Firth Mission School, had brought the messages in their respective villages/areas. It was a few students namely Toko Topu, Nich Saha, Nich Temi and Toko Chilly who had courage enough to open the first ever Church at Talo, a heart of Nyishi settlement in undivided Subansiri District in 1962 A.D. Subsequently, the Churches were established at Jara and Panyu in 1963 and soon expanded to Panior and Parang valleys. Neelam Taram, made mentioned that Churches were erected way back in 1931 at the places like Rangajan I, Rangajan II, Kakoi, Sonajuli etc. but it has got no significance as all these areas now fall under Assam.[27] From early 1960's Shri Bate started visiting various places, doing gospel and also administering baptism. The people were hankering after him and often asked him to visit their villages. In fact, the people have seen the new religion as clear alternative in place of their old one. They were anxiously looking for getting rid of the rituals and sacrifices that involved huge expenditure, which average people could not afford to bear. In the beginning, people were little concerned about the actuality of the religion as their prime and immediate concern was to get themselves free from the intricacies of rituals and sacrifices. The new religion offered solace to the people as they could get ride of the expenses involved in the existing mode or method of worships. By embracing Christianity, they mean doing away the *Weyi Panam* and also going for easy method of worships.

At the dawn of Independence, there was only one church, namely Rangajan Baptist Church in the vicinity of the Nyishi settlement. The converts were also numerically very few. However, when the Nyishi boys started going to mission schools, gradually the number of converts also increased. Still the spread and conversion was negligible till a separate Deacon cum preacher namely, Tayi Bate was ordained in 1961. After the planting of Talo church, the number of churches grew far and wide in different villages and correspondingly the number of converts also increased. Ngurang Budh, a convert, reminiscences: "The people who were previously in a state of complete isolation physically, mentally and spiritually were suddenly broken by the only scintillating news of quick healing and curing the ailment and also the notion of *Donyi Polo Chaonam* (going up to the Heaven). People even from the far flung areas thronged into the nearest Christian family or church with their ailing members for their benediction and prayer."

If the early converts are to be believed, god really does the miracles. Even the severest nature of illness, where the indigenous mode of treatment and cure through rituals/sacrifices completely failed, were being easily healed and cured with a simple prayer without giving away anything. Shri Nabam Taram revealed that, once his elder son fell seriously ill and he was in a state of coma. He could not get any priest at the moment. His wife was crying profusely by seeing the son's condition. Somehow, he got one photo of Jesus Christ. He spontaneously uttered, "I heard you can give life to a dead person; I beg you please give life to my son." Suddenly, his son started crying. He took his son to a few Christians and after their prayer his son was cured. Subsequently, Taram established a church at Nimte village. Shri Nabam Poha narrates how his family became the first Christian family in the area:

> *Probably in1968 my elder brother fell ill seriously. Despite all efforts including taking services of many priests and arranging number of rituals and sacrifices, his condition still persisted. My parents were at loss what to do and what not to do in order to save their son. At that moment news came from Dorum Duyi (present Ziro II) area that the Christians are effectively giving treatment to all kind of ailments. So, my mother decided to shift my ailing brother to Sito village. At Sito special prayer was arranged for my brother and within a couple of days, he was completely cured. Since my brother was at his youthful age of around 24 years, he was fully attracted to the new religion. After coming back from Sito, he established the church at our village (Taw), the first ever in the region. Subsequently, my second elder brother was sent to John Firth Mission School at North Lakhimpur in Assam.*

In the beginning the spiritual aspect has never been the factor for conversion among the Nyishis. Undoubtedly, the economic factor dominated the other reasons. The Nyishis were basically ridden with the perennial nature of rituals and sacrifices through out the life. The majority of people simply cannot afford to sustain this expensive mode of rituals and sacrifices. Some of the early converts openly revealed that they were more concerned about the expenditure incurred in the rituals and were easily attracted to the new religion which could serve them free of cost. A few examples of the convert's narratives bring out this point more clearly. Shri Likha Taba of Panyu village under Ziro II area had incurred heavy expenses including mithun, pig, goat, fowl etc. to cure his only son who was in prolonged illness. He heard the news of Christian people curing all types of diseases or ailment. One day he took his ailing son to Talo village for prayer. To his utter surprise, his son was completely cured after a congregation prayer by the Talo Christians. So, he at once decided to embrace Christianity and consequently became the first Christian family of the village. Mrs. N Yayer narrated how she had embraced Christianity:

> *We were living happy family life with three children - one boy and two girls but suddenly my husband died at about sixth or seventh year of our marriage. Within a month, my elder daughter died and before completion of the first death anniversary of my husband, the youngest child also died. To save my two children, I had put all efforts but utterly failed. Nothing was left for me even to maintain two squares of meal. On top of that, the people who were around us previously when my husband was alive, abstained themselves even from talking. Life had become really disgusting for me. In this state of affairs, suddenly my son fell ill. I had run from pillar to post, chasing one priest after another without much success. The priests might have been reluctant to attend my son because I did not have anything to pay them off. In the mean time, one of my old friends brought news that Christians are giving treatment to any ailing persons that too without any expenditure. So, I decided to take my ailing son to Dem village for treatment. It took me two days to reach Dem which is now located in Lower Subansiri district. The condition of my son was deteriorating and when we reached there he was almost in a coma. A few Christian performed prayers for my son in the evening itself and next day in the morning, few more joined for prayer. To my surprise, second day in the morning, my son started asking for food and within next couple of days, he moved around. This made me fully realize that the Christianity is only alternative where we can rely on. So I became staunch Christian since then.*

Simiiarly, Shri Neelam Taram narrated, how one Likha Takha (one of the early converts) founded church at Panyu village:

Takha had suffered much, both materially and spiritually when his son fell ill seriously. Being the renowned traditional priest of the area, he had tried his best to cure his ailing son. He had also involved many other priests but the condition of his son was turning from bad to worse. At last, he went to Talo Church for seeking prayer for his son. But even after the prayer the condition of his son remained all the same. He took him to North Lakhimpur and then to Tezpur Christian Hospital but without much success. At last he brought back his son to the village and eventually the son died after prolonged illness. Now after this struggle, Takha had lost his faith and belief on rituals and sacrifices. He bitterly regretted that even being a famous traditional priest, he could not be able to save his own son. Desperation mounted and he once for all decided to give up his coveted priesthood to embrace Christianity. He invited his well-wishers and relatives in whose presence he declared that he was converting to Christianity. And hence, Takha founded the church at his village in 1963 and became the first Pastor of that church. Takha's conversion had great impact on the people of the locality because he was a famed priest; he had good rapport with them. Consequently many more people of that area had converted to Christianity.

Shri Techi Bujom narrated: "My son, Techi Boy fell ill seriously. I called almost all priests of the locality and performed number of rituals and sacrifices including mithun, pig, goat etc. But the condition of my son remained same. By this time there were few people like Techi Begi and Tok Ruja, who had already embraced Christianity. One day I asked Teli Murkhi, a priest of our village to conduct chicken liver examination to ascertain whether Christians will cure my son. The examination favoured the proposition and accordingly I took my son to Christian people and after their prayer he was cured. Hence, I along with all my family members embraced Christianity in 1973 and I was entrusted to work as pastor of our Church."

Education has undoubtedly played a vital and decisive role in ushering changes in the society. Through education, mental horizon is expanded and it enables a person to develop critical thinking over the present state of affairs in the society. Similarly among the Nyishis especially those who are exposed to other cultures and studied in the Mission Schools started questioning the validity of various rituals and sacrifices involving huge expenditure and even to some of the superstitious customs and practices. They found in the new religion an alternative making the costly rituals and sacrifices redundant. The Nyishi students studying in the mission schools, when they came back to their villages started preaching the new religion i.e. Christianity and openly denounced the traditional priest centered ritualistic belief system. It may be noted that earlier no missionaries including the indigenous early converts were allowed to propagate Christianity in the region. But later on, the Nyishi students themselves started preaching among the people and through them the outsiders too came for preaching. Hence, gradually the Christian population swelled remarkably in all the Nyishi areas.

IV

Anti-Christian activities

The history of Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh is embodied with a series of persecution and denial of rights and privileges.[28] The outsiders and the missionaries were not allowed to propagate Christianity in the state. In the beginning the local converts were also discouraged from the propagation of new religion. The persecution in one form or the other began since the early part of 1969. In this year the churches of Deed, Dem and Neelam were burnt down by the volunteers of SSB Home Guards allegedly at the behest of one Harban Singh, Area Organizer.[29] Subsequently churches were also burnt down in other parts of Arunachal Pradesh especially in the districts of Siang and Tirap. In Subansiri District alone a total of 47 churches were burnt down till 1974.[30] It may be mentioned here that earlier the Jawans of Home Guards (SSB) clandestinely carried out the persecution but later on with the constitution of Panchayat body, the members with the tacit support of the administrators perpetrated the anti-Christian activities. The early converts had been subjected to physically manhandle. They were tortured, punished and also levied fine. In May 1972, five converts namely Khoda Takha, Likha Takha, Debia Chotum, Debia Takhe and Toko Dodum were captured and put under confinement for about three months at different interior places allegedly by the Panchayat members with the tacit support of local administrators. They were neither formally arrested nor charge sheeted nor produced before the magistrate for trial and release. The physical and mental tortures were meted to them as they were asked to do against their wish and any sort of contact with their relatives was completely cut off. It was only after their complete exhaustion, they were finally freed on 17th July 1972 that too without any formalities.[31]

Keeping in view the alarming growth and spread of Christianity among the people, the Pradesh Council passed a resolution on 5th

October' 1972, according to which 'a person belonging to an indigenous tribal community of Arunachal Pradesh who renounces the traditional belief or faith indigenous to the community to which he or she belongs to and takes to the other belief and faith should be deemed to have deserted the community/tribe and to have forfeited all facilities, benefits, advantage considerations deriving from his/her being a member of the tribe or community.'[32] However, the government of India did not approve the resolution, as it was contrary to the spirit of the constitutional provision of freedom and equality.

The year 1974 witnessed the climax of anti-Christian activities. The plunder and burning down of about 40 churches and villages in Sagalee Sub-Division alone and the outrages on the Christians of other parts of Arunachal occurred in this year. On 25th April 1974, one Tana Ekha of Sango village under Sagalee circle was mercilessly beaten up. He succumbed to his injuries after six days. On 20th July 1974, Smti. Teli Ekhu, w/o Mr. Teli Tad from Khemlee village of same circle was stripped naked and tied on the post upside down in full public view.[33] Interestingly, the local EAC (B. Kumar) was also present during this ordeal perpetrated by one Mr. Techi Takang, a Zilla Parishad Member from Sagalee. These are only a few of innumerable instances in which innocent people were subjected to torture physically and mentally for their only fault of embracing Christianity. Ironically such injustice, illegal and unconstitutional persecutions were carried out in connivance with some of the government officers and representatives.[34] The continued plunder, torture and harassment had created an anxiety and thus feeling of insecurity mounted among the converts. Mr. Nabam Tagum, one of the victims, narrates: "The situation was so tense that it forced the converts especially the Christian leaders to flee from their respective villages to safer places and many had fled to Assam. They were given temporary shelter in mission schools at North Lakhimpur and Tezpur. The converts were forced to denounce the new religion and they were asked to surrender mithun or other domestic animals in lieu of physical harassment and material destructions. A number of mithuns were forcibly taken away from the converts, which were either used in feast or shared among the leaders of the persecution".

The news of the persecution soon spread to outside Arunachal Pradesh and there were corresponding condemnations from all quarters. But this did not change the scenario – persecution continued unchecked, the extent and the quantum of persecution were distorted and the sufferings of the people were not correctly reported. Khoda

Tana said, "The administrators sent regular reports fabricating the truth and denying the incidents, whereas the local Christian Associations had been sending a number of memoranda or petitions narrating the correct and true picture of entire episodes to different authorities including the Prime Minister and the President of India." The physical torture meted to one Mrs. Teli Ekhu as reflected in the memorandum was taken strong exception. Government of India under the Prime ministership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, asked the Chief Commissioner to enquire into the incident and submit detailed report. Mr. Taro Duli from Pech village, argued, 'Mr. K.A.A. Raja, the then Chief Commissioner, hurriedly constituted an official enquiry committee, the report of which was misleading and distortion of truth as it denied the very occurrence of such incident at Sagalee.' Mrs. Teli Ekhu, one of the worse sufferers during the persecution narrated:

> *It was in the month of December 1974, we were preparing for Christmas celebration like previously we were doing. We heard the news of persecution in Doimukh area but I did not anticipate this would also happen to me. That fateful day, I along with few Christian converts were asked to report at Circle Office, Sagalee. When I reached the Office, many people were already there. Among them was one Mr. Techi Takang, who happens to be our family relative. Seeing me, he started abusing me, using all bad terms and spontaneously, I also responded. Then, he caught me held and tied at the post in full public view including the Officers. This way, I suffered. Now sometime the incident strikes in my mind but soon I calm down, as God is my solace.*

The mounting pressures from all quarters compelled the government to send Prof. A.K. Kishku, MP, primarily to assess the ground reality and to find out some amicable settlement of the problem. With his arrival at Itanagar a peace meeting (reconciliation meeting) was convened at Doimukh on 6th May 1975 under the Chairmanship of K.A.A. Raja, the then Chief Commissioner. A five-point resolution was adopted in the meeting, which among others sought to maintain status-quo between the Christian converts and the non-Christians and reaffirmed to endeavour for the greater cause of the community, state, and the nation.[35] It may be mentioned here that the Student's Body i.e. All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) had also played vital role in the peace process. The representatives of AAPSU visited the camp at North Lakhimpur mission to enquire about the people and heard their stories of atrocities. They requested them to return to their respective villages and assured full co-operation in creating congenial atmosphere in the localities. Later, they called on the Chief Commissioner and expressed their concern about the incidents. They also condemned the actions or role played by a few individuals who had perpetrated the persecutions. In fact, with the pursuance of these students' leaders, both the group agreed for reconciliation meeting at Doimukh.

After the Doimukh meeting, the general perpetration of persecution was checked to some extent. But in the remote villages still the fear and tension haunted the people, as many of them were forced to renounce Christianity. At Sagalee, a *Dapo Dingnam* was performed; the Christian converts were forced to take the flesh (meat) of sacrificed animals as an evidence of returning to the indigenous faith *Weyi Panam* Mr. Nabam Runkhi, one of the early Christian converts, said, 'The Christian community had completely lost their faith on the local administration and hence they started pressurizing and pursuing their grievances directly to the government of India. On 12th September 1974, he as a President of Subansiri Baptist Christian Association, submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, narrating what is called the inhuman atrocities meted to the Christian converts and sought her intervention into the matter.' Mr. Runkhi revealed that he was the first Agency Councilor from Sagalee-Doimukh Sub-Division and he was one of instrumental in making Itanagar the Capital of Arunachal Pradesh in 1972. He carried the pieces of bricks from Ita fort (remains of monuments) to Shillong, the then temporary Capital in order to convince the government for establishment of Capital at Itanagar as it is a seat of historical monuments. But later on, may be because of his close association with the Christian converts, Runkhi was deliberately sidelined in the administration. He was also deprived of his membership in the Pradesh Council. In his place, Shri Techi Takang, a staunch opponent of Christian religion was appointed.

Some Nyishi intellectuals argued that the anti-Christian activities especially the mass persecution during the early part of 1970's is one of the most important causes for widespread conversion among the people. Shri Joram Begi, opined that the Christian converts were very negligible during the pre-persecution period. Many people did not know Christianity and its spread was also limited to a few pockets. But the persecution has enlightened almost all people about this religion, as there were widespread protest, propagation and condemnation too. The undue publicity and panic reaction on the part of the non-converts became counter-productive as after the persecution the spread and conversion of Christianity had just multiplied.

Shri Bengia Tolum, one of the pioneers in socio-cultural movement among the Nyishis sharply contradicts the viewpoint that the persecution could be the most important cause for the spread of Christianity among the people. According to him 'there were stray incidents of burning down a few churches, which some people termed as mass persecution. The instances of persecution as such were full of exaggeration and misleading mainly engineered by non-Arunachalee Christians located outside Arunachal Pradesh. It was only the ignorance born out of illiteracy that made some people to be attracted by the new religion. The Christianity, being the first and the new religion to enter into the Nyishi belt had added advantage of drawing people's attention.' There was undue interference from the outside Christians under the banner of 'North East Christian Council'. There are certainly some exaggerations and a lot of propaganda was carried out at the behest of outside Christian communities. Mr. Techi Bujom, himself a convert revealed, "After the persecution, a delegate of about 27 Christian converts including me were taken to Don Bosco School, Shillong. We were asked to narrate the incidents and also display the persecutions at general ground for photography etc. Our stories and actions were recorded and later on submitted to the government."

To subvert the process of conversion another attempt on the line of legislative measures was taken up under the aegis of 'Arunachal Pradesh Development-cum-Cultural Convention' held on May 21st 1976 at Pasighat. A resolution seeking the denial of privileges to the Christian converts was passed which was almost similar to the resolution already passed by the Pradesh Council in 1972. It also urged upon the government of Arunachal Pradesh to take immediate and effective steps for the implementation of the resolution. Shri P.K. Thungon, the then Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh had made a statement on the floor of the Assembly on 18th May 1978, relating to the denial of privileges/facilities to the Christian converts. The Arunachal Legislative Assembly had already adopted a resolution calling upon the Government to take suitable measures for the promotion and maintenance of age-old cultural heritage of the territory. It resolved that the resolutions adopted by the Pradesh Council in October 1972 and at the cultural convention held at Pasighat in May 1976 should be urgently implemented. The statement reads:

In pursuance of the resolution passed by the Assembly, the

Govt. intends to issue orders that for the present the following special benefits as are available to such tribal people who have renounced their indigenous faith and got converted into any faith which is not indigenous to the territory: (a) Post-matriculate and Post secondary stipends as available to any other S/T shall however be not treated as special benefit. (b) Stipend @ Rs.75 per month in lieu of ration as available to boarders of hostels attached to the higher secondary, middle and inter-village schools inside Arunachal Pradesh. (c) Special preference given to Arunachalee tribal contractors in the matter of allotment of contract works such as road construction/building on work order basis without having to deposit security and preferential treatment to the extent of 7 and ½ above the lowest quoted rate.[36]

While, reacting to this statement, Toko Chilly opined, 'It is clear that both the passage of such resolutions and the denial of benefits are contrary to the provisions in the constitution of India. It might have been done either due to the lack of knowledge about the intricacies of constitutional provisions or due to the biased attitude of the administrators and the bureaucrats.'

V

Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act 1978

The Freedom of Religion Act, 1978 was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 19th May 1978. While moving the motion, the Chief Minister, Shri P.K.Thungon, put an argument that there has been persistent demand from the people of Arunachal Pradesh to take some concrete and positive measures for preservation and promotion of their traditional culture particularly their indigenous faith. He based his argument on the two resolutions passed in 1972 and 1976 as mentioned earlier. The anxiety of the people regarding their traditional culture and faith is quite genuine because if no timely effective action is taken, their age-old culture and faith might be overwhelmed by different culture and faith, which are alien to the society. The Chief Minister revealed that some forces are operating in the territory whose intention is to subvert the traditional culture and faith of our people through unfair means. With these contentions, he sought the Hon'ble Members to support the bill and pass in the Assembly.

However, the proceeding of that session reveals that the bill was hurriedly introduced and passed without much debate. While taking part in the brief debate, a few members like Late Tomo Riba, Onyok Perme, Lijum Ronyia and Jonypum Jugli sought certain amendment to the bill keeping conformity with the constitutional provisions especially the Chapter III (Fundamental Rights) so as to avoid criticism and legal complicacies in its implementation. But the Speaker overruled their suggestion on the ground that for any amendment to a bill, a member shall have to give notice of proposed amendment at least 2 (two) days before the tabling of that bill. Ironically, the copy of the said bill was made available to the members only a day before its debate. It seems that the bill was poorly debated and passed hastily in the Assembly on 19th May 1978. The bill finally received the assent of the President of India on 25th October 1978 and become operational (Act) in Arunachal Pradesh as a law of the land. The Act provides among others in Chapter III "that no person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to any other religious faith by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.' The Chapter IV says, 'any person contravening the provisions contained in section 3, shall without prejudice to any civil liability, be punishable with imprisonment to the extent of two years and fine up to ten thousand rupees.' Similarly the section 6 says that, 'an offence under this Act shall be cognizable and shall not be investigated by an officer below the rank of an Inspector of police."[37]

With the enactment of this law numerous questions strike in the mind of the people. Whether it was at all necessary to enact such legislation? Whether it betrays the spirit of secularism as enshrined in the constitution? Whether it infringed the fundamental rights and right to self-determination? Whether human rights were involved in such legislation? so on, and so forth. Some people reacted sharply and criticized the Act as it aimed at a particular community i.e. the Christianity. According to them, the Act is discriminating against one religion and the legislation was not maintainable in a court of law. In any case the main problem of the Act rested not on the profuse aim of the Act but its possible deliberate or otherwise interpretation of certain terms/clauses of the Act and the fear of its actual implementation. The Act makes conversion a cognizable offence and leaves its interpretation to an inspector of police.

While participating in a seminar on the subject in 1978 at Delhi, Dr. Rahmutulla Khan of JNU, (an expert on International Law), argued that the title *Freedom of Religion Act* was itself misleading. It called for freedom of religion by preventing conversion, which is part of the practice of every religion. The interpretation of the Act has been vested in an ordinary police official, which was unwise. Dr. Khan felt that such power might not be entrusted even to the judiciary, which is not considered to be an arbiter on the question of interpreting religious tenets. The Act violates one of the recognized components of the constitution – Freedom of Profession and Practice of Religion. Further, it violated the freedom of equal treatment before the law by excluding Christianity from among the religions listed therein as indigenous religions.[38] In the same seminar, Mr. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer of the Supreme Court of India opined: 'The founding father said India was secular. The part IV of the Directive Principles confirmed the secular character of the constitution. The word secular in the constitution carried more meaning than the dictionary provides. It is difficult to define who is a Hindu and who is a Christian. You can belong to the various faiths and even be an atheist and still call yourself a Hindu or Christian. We have the Christian communities who have been here with the tradition of indigenous Christianity for centuries, something that is unparalleled in Europe or elsewhere.' [39] He concluded by saying that, 'the politician and the government of this country would accept the statement that equal attitude towards all religions was the theme of secularism in India and there shall be no discrimination by the state.'[40]

More or less the people including the intellectuals, academicians, politicians and even the judiciary have not wholeheartedly welcomed this Act. Apart from this, the Act itself was defective in nature and content. The very terms force, fraud and inducement cannot be easily ascertained because the people are neither forcefully converted nor there are visible fraud and inducement for conversion. It is difficult to understand that people are converted without their consent, as the religion is purely a personal and internal matter of conscience and faith.

Initially, the government of Arunachal Pradesh had tried to execute this Act as reported in the Christian pamphlets. One Hajung Jugli along with two of his friends were arrested in 1979 at Changlang. They were kept in police custody for about 30 days but without filing any formal charge sheet or FIR against them. It may be mentioned here that a similar type of legislation was also moved in Indian Parliament, which was formally introduced on 22nd December 1978.[41] The Christian communities had reason to be worried as the introduction of a Central anti-Conversion Bill comes at a time when disturbing reports were appearing about what was happening in Arunachal Pradesh after the enactment of anti-conversion law. It is to be seen that the Act had certainly emboldened the perpetrators of the persecution, as there were fresh burning of churches in 1978-80.[42] The Christian converts had alleged that the Administration has issued what are called 'internal instruction' that no Christian should be given jobs, contract works, license, privileges, facilities etc. until he/she has given written statement renouncing his faith.[43] Hence, a fear psychosis or tension still mounted among the Christian converts for quite sometime.

Meanwhile, there had been continued protest and condemnation of the Act from Christian community as representations or memorandum had been repeatedly submitted to the concerned authorities including the President and the Prime Minister of India. The most important communiqué regarding this Act and the anti-conversion bill brought in Parliament was that of an open letter from Mother Teresa, addressed to the Prime Minister, Morarji Desai and the Parliamentarians. She writes, 'After much prayer and sacrifice, I write to you asking you to face God in prayer, before you take the step which will destroy the joy and the freedom of our people...today all over the country everybody feels insecure because the very life of freedom of conscience is being touched'. [44] She further stated: 'religion is something that you and I cannot touch. Religion is the worship of God. Therefore, is matter of a conscience. I alone must decide for myself and you for your self, what we choose...you cannot give what you do not have. This new move that is being brought before the Parliament under the cover of freedom of religion is false. There is no freedom if a person is not free to choose according to his or her conscience. Our people in Arunachal are so disturbed. All these years our people have lived together in peace. Now religion is used as a deadly weapon to destroy the love they had for each other, just because some are Christian, some Hindu, and some tribal. Are you not afraid of God?' [45]

She cautioned, 'Do not belittle our Hindu religion saying that our Hindu poor people give up their religion for 'a plate of rice'. To my knowledge, I have not seen this being done, though we feed thousands of poor of all caste and creeds, though thousands have died in our hands beautifully in peace with god.' [46] She attacked the biased attitude of the government by saying that, 'Turning to another sad point, I wish to inform that I have been trying to get into Arunachal Pradesh for some time now, but so far I have not succeeded and yet the Ramakrishna mission members are entering freely. We are in 87 places in India. Why are we not with our poor people in Arunachal?'[47]

Through this letter Mother Teresa had tried to convince the Prime Minister and the members of law making body regarding the implications of such a move. Because of the vigorous opposition and persistent condemnations from all quarters, the bill pertaining to anti-conversion brought in the Parliament was finally dropped.

Now the pertinent question arises, why these anti-Christian activities? What were the reasons behind the enactment of legislation against conversion? Was it necessary to enact such law? Is it not contrary to the constitutional rights enshrined in our constitution? We ought to have impartial scrutiny about the argument in favour as well as against it. Those who favour legislation argued that there was alarming growth of Christian converts as Churches increased from just 5 in 1963 to about 50 in 1974. However, the Christian converts had countered the point by substantiating the census report of 1971 where no Christian population was reflected in Arunachal. But a considerable Hindu population was shown in the census that too in District wise i.e. Kameng 19.68%, Subansiri 13.32%, Siang 13.27% and Lohit 49.96%.[48] It may be mentioned here that in Elwin's survey of NEFA tribes in the late fifties there was no reference of Hindu population in the territory except among the Noctes of Tirap.[49] Then the question arises how the Hindu population figured that too substantially in the census report of 1971? Was it the settled outsiders in the territory? Or was the census being manipulated? Perhaps all these happened.

The next accusation against the Christian missionary is of detribalizing the tribal people. The protagonist's chief complaint against the Christianity is that it has destroyed their culture, tradition, custom and practices. The Christian converts countered the charges by saying that it was not the church, which entered the tribal land or abode. The first to enter the difficult and rugged terrain was the administration followed by so-called modernization process. Then came the people like merchant, shopkeepers, petty traders, contractors and labours etc. They argued, when Christianity first entered the scene, the detribalization process had long been ruining the tribal society. In fact, the detribalization process we are speaking of is too complex to allow simple answer. There is no single agency, which can be termed as responsible for detribalization of a given tribal society. Culture is an organically integrated whole. Elements of culture are so inter-knitted and interlinked that one cannot tamper with one without running the risk of metamorphosing the entire organism. For example in Arunachal Pradesh the creation of state, district and sub-divisional authorities had weakened the traditional leadership in a village, which was a self-contended whole. Money-economy destroyed the barter-system and accentuated inequality. Modern education has broken the tribal simplicity, work culture, unity and discipline even among the villagers. The Christianity is said to have westernized the tribals especially in northeast India. The converts adopted western mode and western way of life and discouraged the tribal arts and crafts, dances, songs, music etc. The Christian community asked:

> Have the Indian been westernized because they have adopted western democratic institutions and western ideas? Is one westernized when he eats bread and butter or use spoon or speaks English? Have the Indians remained true to their original identity despite imbibing western political and social notions? If they have, can the tribals not remain true to themselves after adopting western elements of western culture and religion they think suitable? The tribal Christians eat the same food, live in the same types of house, and work in the same type of fields as people do in the rest of India, allowing for local and tribal variations. He keeps his village festivity and goes his daily round of life like co-villagers. Women retain their traditional dress and most men dress themselves in the traditional way. Of course, the urban population and those who that have been to schools or colleges usually prefer to wear trousers, possess pacca houses in-built with modern facilities. But same things happen all over India especially among the educated and urbanized people.[50]

The most serious accusation against the Christianity is that it has been fomenting (encouraging) extremist activities and thus unleashed trouble and violence in the northeast especially in the Christian dominated states of Nagaland and Mizoram.[51] The Christian community refuted the charges, 'we would like to ask who were responsible for the extremist groups among the Meities of Manipur; demand for separate statehood for Ahoms and Bodos, demand of separate land by ULFA in Assam, all of whom are Hindus.'[52] The Christian community strongly resents the propaganda of some section of the people blaming every trouble on Christianity. According to them, the Christian missionary brought to the tribal - education, health care, good habits, music and peace. It has given their language a script, a grammar, a dictionary and rich literature. When the administration entered, when detribalization started under the impact of modern civilization, there was a spiritual vacuum, which needed to be filled. They argued, it was neither the administration nor the development officer who could have given what the missionary did. B.K. Roy Barmon, too, said, 'In many areas Christianity appears to have served the role of filling up the intellectual and spiritual vacuum caused by the growing skepticism among the tribal population about their traditional faith and world-view.'[53]

In fact, the tribal grievances are manifold. The first same point in tribal area is loss of tribal land and the political entity. Subsequently, it leads to economic deprivation, which accentuates inequality and frustration among the people. It is known that the addressing of these problems is the solution to most of the extremist activities in northeast. Now what could be the viable approach/policy towards the tribal in the context of their over all development? The options are isolation, monopoly rule of administration, Hinduization or assimilation, Christianization and freedom. Undoubtedly, the freedom could be the right choice, because the tribals themselves should be given right to decide their future. Pt. Nehru did not try merely to philosophize, but his love and concern for the tribals were evident in all his contacts and statements. He said, 'The Govt. of India is determined to help the tribal people to grow according to their own genius and tradition; it is not the intention to impose anything on them.'[54] According to him, there is no doubt that the free intermingling of cultures has always been beneficial. So long as the borrowing has been natural and in harmony with the cultural setting and the psychological make-up of the people, it has been eminently beneficial and even added to the richness of their culture. But the other way around may lead to complete annihilation of the existing cultural ethos.

Many have advocated the integration of the tribal through assimilation and even some have idea of absorption into Hindu society in a disguised term of mainstream culture. An attempt to produce cultural homogeneity and integration through induced assimilation can be dangerous. The classic example is the present Tripura where the natives that owned the entire land have been reduced to less than one third of the total population of the state. They are daily retreating to the interior, with hardly any representation in the government and administration. But we must admit and appreciate that the Nehruvian policy towards Arunachal had been always well guarded and full of cautiousness. Nehru said, 'the problem of the tribal area is to make the people feel that they have perfect freedom to live their own lives and to develop according to their wishes and genius. India to them should signify not only a protecting force but also a liberating one. Any conception that India is ruling them and that they are the ruled, or that customs and habits with which they are unfamiliar are going to be imposed upon them will alienate them'[55]

VI

Impact of Christianity among the Nyishis

As far as the impact of Christianity is concerned, there is clear dichotomy not only among the general people but also among the scholars. Some of them have argued that Christianity has completely displaced the traditional culture while others have expressed the opinion that the tribal culture did not undergo significant change in spite of the influence of Christianity. F.S. Downs said, 'Christianity has not displaced or ruined the tribal identity; instead a new community emerged that was a synthesis of the old and new which nevertheless maintained a distinctive tribal identity.'[56] While commenting on the humanitarian service given by the missionaries, Downs asserts that, 'service was provided to all, cutting across family, clan, village, tribal and racial boundaries. The local Christians were similarly encouraged to transcend their traditionally narrow loyalties in service to others.'[57] J.H. Hutton has expressed his antipathy towards missionaries in these words: 'Old beliefs and customs are dying, the old traditions are being forgotten, and the number of Christian and quasi-Christians is steadily increasing and the spirit of change is invading and pervading every aspect of life.'[58] It is to be noted that, education and literature were closely related to evangelization. Education was in fact, one of the most effective instruments for the spread of Christianity. The missionaries tended to make a distinction between the religious (what they referred to as superstitious) and the non-religious elements in the culture. Their attitude towards the non-religious elements that they did not regard as contrary to Christianity was positive. Thus for instance, their attitude towards the indigenous language was positive and in putting it into writing they actually re-enforced the culture. Their main trust on development of language and literature has positive impact on the people, as even the village folk could be able to read and write in simple way.

In the words of Toko Kach, "the role of Christianity was mainly acculturative. Those who have studied the tribe have demonstrated that the Christians are more educated, change oriented, successfully engaged in modern economic activities than the non-Christians." Usually this impact is identified as being due primarily to the educational work of the Christian missions. For the evangelical missions, only Christianity was the true faith, and therefore any other faith system was dismissed as superstitious and incompatible with the gospel. From this perspective, the cultural elements that they rejected included sacrifices, belief in spirits, cremation of dead, totemism and ancestor worship. However, unlike other denominations, the Catholic Church gradually approved some of the traditional religious elements. While opposing the religious component of the traditional culture, the missionaries provided substitutes in the form of sacraments, congregational life, prayers, songs, burial of dead, the Bible as the source of life, liturgy, hope and courage, ordained priests and a new form of religious life. According to the Christian converts, 'the rejection of the religious elements in the old life did not in any way alienate or result in the loss of people's identity, because the traditional religious element had not contributed to that in the first place. In fact, it was in the new forms of religious life that the tribal identity was strengthened because the practices and structures of the church operated at the ethnic rather than sub-ethnic level.'

The rapid growth of Christianity is illustrated in the following tables taken from the census figures:

Table 5.3: Growth of Christian population in Arunachal Pradesh

Census Year	*Total Population*	*Christian Population*	*Christian % to total Population*	*Growth of Christian Population in %*
1961	336558	1438	0.43	-
1971	467511	3684	0.79	256
1981	631839	27306	4.32	741
1991	864558	89013	10.29	326

(Computed on the basis of census reports)

The above illustrations clearly show a high growth rate of Christian population in all census years. We can easily presume that rate of growth would be largest in comparison to other religious communities. The figure must have been just double in the census 2001 (not available). Consequently, the demographic changes based on religion have been imminent as there are phenomenal growths of Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh. In his book (2001), Neelam Taram has furnished the following details relating to denomination-wise strength of church and baptized member in the context of Arunachal Pradesh as a whole.

Table 5.4: Comparative Church Strength and number of Baptized members		
Denomination	*No. of Church*	*No. of Baptized Member*
Roman Catholic	500	1,95,000
Baptist	570	75,000
Revival	225	65,000
Presbyterian	36	4600
Grace Convent	09	300
Pentecostal	02	500
Total 06	1342	3,40,400

(*Source*: Church Records)[59]

There may be some discrepancies, as almost all churches in Arunachal Pradesh do not have proper and exhaustive records especially the old ones. Now, some churches have started maintaining their up to date records. In any case, there is no denying the fact that today the majority of Nyishis are the followers of different denominations of Christianity. In order to assess the growth of Christian population, two distinct villages - one from extreme rural area and the other from urban area have been surveyed.

Table 5.5: Growth of Christian population in Parang village			
Year	*Total Population*	*Converted*	*Growth in %*
1971	210	10	4.8
1981	305	65	21.31
1991	411	345	83.94
2001	504	482	95.63

(*Source*: Computed on the basis of field survey)

Table 5.6: Growth of Christian population in Ganga village			
Year	*Total Population*	*Converted*	*Growth in %*
1971	75	15	20
1981	135	50	37.04
1991	240	170	70.83
2001	375	320	85.33

(*Source*: Computed on the basis of field survey)

The above tables precisely reveal that there is higher consistency in the overall growth rate of Christian converts. Though the sample has been taken from two different variables i.e. rural and urban backgrounds, there is no much difference in terms of growth of conversion in these villages.

Table 5.7: Cumulative Record of Nyishi Baptist Church

Year	*Church*	*Baptized member*	*Evangelist*	*Deacon*	*Field-coordinator*	*Range Pastor*
1992	150	27000	5	2	1	2
2002	271	40,000	12	4	3	5

(*Source*: Church records, NBCC, Kangkar Nallah)

Strength wise, the Baptist Church and the Roman Catholic Church are neck to neck while other denominations like Revival Church, Pentecostal Church etc. are far behind. In the field of education the Roman Catholic is far ahead by running as many as 11 Schools in Arunachal Pradesh (out of which 9 located in Nyishi belt) as on 1999-2000[60] and recently established a College at Itanagar. The Nyishi Baptist Church Council is running three educational institutions besides one theological training institute at Kangkar Nallah, Naharlagun.[61] Among the Nyishi Baptist Christians, the churches are entirely run and well organized by local people themselves as they are completely independent of outside control. The church structure is evolved in a hierarchical order. The violation of church rule is always treated seriously and the offenders are debarred from attending regular church services and also in other religious functions. Such a person may only be allowed to become the member again provided he/she spends a considerable period of time and willingly seeks repentance of the offence committed. The Roman Catholic Church is generally looked after and monitored by the Fathers in a hierarchical order through the respective diocese, which are located outside the state. The solemnization of baptism is also simple as it is done by sprinkling of water on the forehead. Haimandorf, a renowned anthropologist, writes:

> *A novel source of dissension among Nishis (now known as Nyishi) who inhabit the hills adjoining the plains of Assam is the influence of Christian missions on young people educated in their schools in places such as North Lakhimpur and Tezpur. While numerous Hindu children go to such schools without being induced to change their religion, a good many Nishi youths have been converted to Christianity...they allegedly refused to share the houses of adherents of the old faith, and this means that old parents were*

> *abandoned by their converted children, who claimed that they could not stay in dwellings where "devils" were worshipped and the meat of sacrificial animals was consumed... it was alleged, moreover, that converts, not satisfied with this symbolic withdrawal from village life, went a step further by abusing and physically attacking priests as they invoked the gods in the performance of traditional Nishi rituals.*[62]

The authenticity and correctness of his information needs further scrutiny, as the views of the Christian converts were not recorded.

However, an internal psychological tension is emerging between the Christian community and the non-Christians. The latter charged the former of uprooting socio-cultural fabric and indigenous faith, belief system and practices. The Christians are being charged with eroding the cultural and religious fabric of the society. The Christian converts desist themselves from associating or joining social function including the festivals. The practices, which are contrary to their religion, are termed as sin and hence they openly denounce and disassociate from such practices. But the intellectuals and even the growing youths those who have cultural consciousness are openly joining the festival without undermining their religious belief. It may be mentioned here that in comparison to other denominations, the Catholic Christians seem to be more liberal and more accommodative as far as their dealing with the socio-religious aspect of the tribal is concerned. To cite example, the Catholic Mission School at Juli (Itanagar) has been celebrating Nyokum Festival for the last three years with great pomp and show. Similarly, their attitude towards the indigenous food habits are quite adjustable as unlike other denominations they do not insist restriction of *Opo* (alcohol) and sharing of sacrificed or killed animals. In traditional Nyishi society, hospitality of a guest is generally marked with sharing of *Opo* (alcohol), *Aching* (meal) and *Ading* (meat) but in Christian life taking of wine is almost prohibited. Whatever may be the religious significance, but from the point of view of the health, the banning of alcohol has a positive impact as many people are dying due to excessive drinking especially the foreign liquor, which causes serious ailments relating to liver, kidney, heart and lungs.

The other important and positive quality of Christianity among the Nyishis is that the management of churches is completely in the hand of people. In other words, there is no direct control from outside agency or organization as far as the functioning of church is concerned while temples and mosque in the state are generally run and managed by the outsiders. There is strong allegation of outside funding for spreading Christianity among the innocent people but it does not have clear evidence. However probably, the schools and health centres run by the Christian missionaries receive grants or donations from some organizations and individuals, which is a common phenomenon for all such institutions. Nevertheless, the outside missionaries and the evangelists are occasionally invited at the Christian conventions or congregation meetings purportedly for preaching. It is obvious that they must have been sponsored or financed by some organizations. However, the expenditures incurred in such functions and even for running the concerned church, the funds are locally mobilized through donations, gifts and offerings. In any case, there is no clue or authentic record of direct monetary funding from outside agency.

One striking feature of Christianity among the Nyishis is that the evangelization or spreading of Christianity is fully taken up by the indigenous people themselves. Generally, the local youths are sponsored for undergoing theological training and after their successful completion of the course, in turn, they preach among the people. Other related important aspect of Christianity among the Nyishis is that there are hierarchical structures of church organizations through which the evangelization and other ecclesiastical works are carried. This is firmly evolved among the Baptist Christians, as incidentally Baptist denomination is the first to enter into the Nyishi belt. At the top, they have an apex body, earlier known as 'Subansiri Baptist Christian Association' but now rechristened to 'Nyishi Baptist Church Council' (NBCC).[63] Below this, there is a field coordinator, then Area Pastor and finally the Pastor for each church. Again, within the church there are different wings like youth's wing, women's wing, children's wing etc. Through these different bodies the working of a village and for that matter the entire Christian communities are streamlined. It is primarily because of this indigenization of evangelical works and the firmed church structures; there is no strong or direct resentment from the non-Christians.

Nevertheless, there is some feeling of desperations even among the Christian converts who complain of discrimination from the church management committee and the fellow Christians for not attending services to the needy one. Their only reason is that, they did not attend the church regularly and pay offerings or gifts in the church. The non-Christian community has many more to complain, which include social boycott from them (converts) during the rituals and sacrifices, death of non-Christians, festivals, marriages etc. They also refuse to take/share food and drink especially during such occasion saying that these are simply worshipping of evil spirits, which is contrary to Christian belief. Mr. Taba Nyere, a prominent traditional priest, argued:

'The basic value of morality has been destroyed when one converted to Christianity. In Nyishi society, women are restricted during her menstruation period especially on her diet, movement, and also bodily contact with the male member or the husband. Similarly, the murderer, thief, adulterer, incest etc. are always subjected to rigorous punishment and they are restricted from joining any socio-religious function because the moral of the Nyishi demands that a person should be free from such vices or crime. However, there is no such provision in the Christian religion. All types of crime or sins committed by a person can be pardoned just through confessional prayer.' According to him this is not a solution to the problem, rather it is indirectly encouraging the people to go for such immoral activities. The punishment is so mild that, it will never restrain a person from committing crime.

Shri Tedi Techi, former President Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Culture Society (NIFCS), pointed out that 'the basic social institution like marriage has been converted into mere religious function. In Nyishi society, a matrimonial relation has got uniqueness in both meaning and importance. It served as a uniting force for long lasting family bonds between the two families. There is continuous exchanging of materials i.e. mithuns and other eatables from the groom's side and traditional ornaments from the bride's side. The marriage formally culminates with the performance of *Pahi Hinam* (rituals with sacrifices of a fowl by the bride). But this is not the end rather it is a beginning because after this successful marriage the members of both families will try to tie another knot and this will go on. However, with the onslaught of new faith, this elaborate marriage institution becomes insignificant. It has practically turned to be a day's affairs, where a pomp and show party is arranged and the presents (gifts) are expected from the guests.' He also charged the Christianity of discouraging and abandoning the popular folk songs and dances merely on the ground that these are all superstitious in nature. In absence of written tradition, the folklore or folk culture are the only source through which we can deconstruct our past glory or past history. The mythological songs like *Idh Bingnam*, *Buya Sonam*, *Nyeme Kabnam, Bingjam Jamnam, Gomba Banam*, etc. are the source of Nyishi civilizations.

Shri Bengia Tolum opined that 'the Christian community has sometimes adopted unfair means to convert the innocent people who ultimately create tension in the family as well as within the villagers. He cites one example from Kebi village in Yazalee area. Gradually, almost all families except a few in the village have converted to Christianity. The Christian family had formed a working group sometime called youth. All working members both male and female come under this banner. The primary purpose is to extend physical helping hand especially to those needy ones. But they refused to go for helping the non-Christian families, despite repeated requests. The clear message is that these families should also convert to Christianity, and then only they will extend their services. In a rural village where the economic activity demands joint labour force, an individual or family cannot stand. This is why; ultimately the remaining families were also compelled to embrace Christianity.' Similarly, he cited another case in which one family where the wife had embraced Christianity but her husband refused to join her. The problem arose when the Christian leaders deprived the woman from taking baptism on the ground that her husband is a non-Christian. It is said, a Christian without taking baptism has got no meaning as he/she will not get the salvation. The woman started quarreling with her husband, holding him responsible for not allowing her to take baptism. A tension prevailed in the family ceaselessly. Therefore, one day, the husband decided to sacrifice all his logic and principle so that his family does not break and he converted with heavy heart to Christianity.

But the Christian converts argued, 'With the coming of Christianity, the morality of people has not been degraded but a lot of immorality that prevailed in the society has been wiped out. There was confusion and a feeling of insecurity mounted in all respects, mentally insecure, because of the fear psychosis prevailed owing to the superstitious beliefs and practices. To cite an example, a living person is offered sacrifices in order to avert danger or wrath believed to be wedded or carry evil spirit (Jeur or Ramter Angbu). Physically insecure because an individual has got no widespread well-wishers or friends who could support and stand behind him at the time of trouble. In other words a sense of collectivity or helping hand nature was absent as every one is busy in their individual problem. Lacking spiritually, because the society is engulfed with rituals and sacrifices which are based on superstition. Economic condition was unstable because their income is almost being wasted in the performances of rituals and sacrifices. Economic consciousness was lacking as many people are confined and believed in traditional mode of economic activities which forced them to remain from hand to mouth. The people were some time compelled to depend on forest products like *Tachi* (Sago palm), *Tashe, Tabe* etc'.

The Christianity has opened up the people's mind and put a new vision to the tradition-bounded society. It has given a platform where all people are allowed to mix up and interact with one another. The art of good living is imparted and people share their joy as well as sorrow. The age-old practices and habits that are detrimental to the sound growth of the society are being discouraged and discarded. The polygamy, child and forced marriage, inhuman acts of some of the oath and ordeal like *Sotung Tungnam*, *Sodung Einam*, *Piriya Pinam* etc. are now gradually done away with. The most important contribution in this regard is of course the prohibition or restriction of *Opo Tangnam* (alcohol). *Opo* is one of the major causes of quarrel or friction, which lead to tension in the family and the community as well.

In order to sustain the economic hardship, the Christian community has evolved a joint labour force in every village. Any family can avail the services of this working force by paying a meager fee, which is meant for raising church fund. In this way, no one feels economically insecure because almost all could now afford to have self-sustenance. The Christianity has enabled the people to feel conscious about their traditional dress. The Nyishi dresses (for both male and female), their design and varieties of style are first developed by the Christian communities by introducing modifications. Mr. Khoda Tana pointed out that it was the Christian community who had first used and popularized the Nyishi language through Roman script with certain modification. He claims that almost all Christian people can read and write Nyishi language. The songs, pamphlet, other study materials and even the Bible are now being written in Nyishi language.

To sum up, the spread of Christianity among the Nyishis was very slow before 1970s, but as a result of persecution and consequent legislation against the conversion (Arunachal Pradesh Indigenous Act 1978), the Nyishis have been embracing Christianity rapidly since then. The most important factor for the spread of Christianity has been the priest-centred expensive rituals and sacrifices. There are two divergent views regarding the impact of Christianity on tribal traditional culture. The proponents of one view argue that Christianity has completely eroded the indigenous culture while the others have expressed the opinion that the tribal culture has not undergone any significant change inspite of the influence of Christianity.

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6

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY BASED ON INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS

Introduction

Almost all ethnic groups have their own indigenous religion. Owing to the onslaught of other dominant religions many have lost their originality as the basic aspects of their religious belief have been eroded or amalgamated. In this regard, the tribals are the most affected ones. However, some of them could able to keep up and evolve their religious tradition through the process of selection and accommodation thereof in consonance with the changing time and situation. On the basis of traditional religion, the people of Arunachal Pradesh can be divided into two broad groups i.e. the Bodic group and the non-Bodic group, in other words, the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist. The Bodic group is again sub divided into Hinayana cult and Mahayana cult. The tribes like Monpa, Sherdukpen, Memba, Kamba etc. follow Mahayana cult while Khamtis, Singphos etc. follow Hinayana cult.[1]

However, the status of Buddhist religion as an indigenous religion of the people is debatable. The fact is that, the Buddhism flourished in this part of the country only from the 14th century onwards. The centre of attraction to this religion is of course the famous Buddhist Monastery at Tawang. One can put an argument that the Buddhism is an indigenous religion because it has become identical to the tribes who profess it, although the others like Akas, Mijis etc. living in the same geographical region do not subscribe to it. For the sake of understanding, again the non-Bodic group can also be divided into two sub groups i.e. the worshippers of Donyi Polo and the worshippers of other distinct indigenous religion. However, the present study is limited to the Tani group of tribes with special emphasis on the Nyishis who profess Donyi Polo as an indigenous religion. The Tani group includes Adi (Galo, Padam Pasi, Minyong, Bori, Bokar, Rambo, Milang etc.), Apatani, Nyishi, Tagin and so-called Hill Miris and the plain-tribes like Mishing. The other sub group includes Mishmi, Aka, Miji, Khowa, Tangsa, Nocte, Wancho, Yobin etc.[2] but they don't subscribe the notion of Abo Tani as forefather. However, with the intrusion of other institutionalized religions especially the Christianity and the Hinduism, many people within the tribe have either embraced or got influenced by these religions. Some people have been trying to create new religious movement based on indigenous belief systems, faiths and practices. This chapter seeks to study the religious identity based on these new religious movements with especial reference to the Nyishis. It is divided into following sections:

1. Donyi Polo: An Indigenous Religion.
2. Indigenous Religious Movement.
3. Influence of Hinduism on Indigenous Religious Movement.

I

Donyi Polo: An Indigenous Religion

Belief in natural objects like sun, moon, water, fire etc. is the universal feature of the tribal religion. The belief in supernatural power that is embodied in the natural things necessitates them to profess and worship these natural objects. Among the Arunachalees, the tribes that dwell in the central belt are the believers of *Donyi-Polo* (sun-moon) as a supreme god. On this basis, the tribes whom we call the 'Tani group' believe themselves to be the descendants of *Abo Tani* (mythical forefather), are evolving a religion called *Donyi-Poloism*, thereby posing an indigenous religious identity. It may be mentioned here that the people have been practising their religious belief since the time immemorial but the problem lies mainly due to the lack of recognition in absence of an equivalent term to name their religion. However, at present the term *Donyi-Polo* has become analogous to the tribal religion in Arunachal Pradesh. As far as the origin of *Donyi-Polo* is concerned almost all tribes belonging to *Tani* constellation believe that it was created by the supreme power that create the entire universe including the man. According to Tagin myth, '*Korium* and *Kolu* gave birth to *Riumji (Iji-Donyi)*, the sun, *Lobo-Polo (Polo)*, the moon and *Riumsi (Esi)*, the water. In the process, *Riumchijerin*, an offshoot of *Korium* and *Kolu*, assigned *Donyi* and *Polo* to rise and travel through *Nidokolo* to illuminate the earth and to *Esi* to flow through the earth.'[3] There is obviously little variation among different tribes regarding the meaning and role of *Donyi-Polo*.

Among the Tani group of tribes, the Adis are the first to formalize *Donyi Polo* as their indigenous religion. The Adis believe that a supernatural power or creator who is called Sedi by the Padam-Minyong and Jimi by the Galos has created all beings and things of the universe.[4] In the process of evolution, *Sedi*, the creator himself transformed parts of his body into rivers, valleys, air, water, stones, rocks, flora, fauna, the sun, the moon and the stars. *Sedi*'s hair was transformed into vegetation on the earth, his tears into rain and water, his bones into rocks and stones and his two eyes into *Donyi* 'the sun' and *Polo* 'the moon'. Thus, *Sedi* has become obscure and silent after the creation. But he continued to keep a vigil on humanity through the pair of searching eyes. Hence, *Donyi* and *Polo*, the manifestation of the two eyes of *Sedi*, is regarded as the symbol of creator and protector of mankind.[5] According to Galo myths, *Jimi* is the creator of the universe including the *Melo* (sky) and the *Sidi* (earth). Out of the union of *Melo* and *Sidi* all things and beings on the earth and in the sky including the *Donyi* (the sun) and *Polo* (the moon) were born. There are certain other narratives regarding the origin and the role of *Donyi-Polo*. One of such narratives is the presence of two powerful suns in the universe. At that time both the suns used to rise and set one after another giving light to the universe round the clock. There was no nighttime for rest or sleep. The land became dry and the vegetation also started to dry up. The living creatures including the man found it difficult to live on or survive. Finally, the elders of the society met and decided to shoot down one of the suns. The task of shooting down the sun was entrusted to *Etung Tikling* (a great and skilled archer). A description of the situation is narrated in *Adi Dooiyeng* as given below:

Donyi e ane didune
Loodi e tumi e giti kaane
Tikling mite olang me
Nane kile billet dope
Mone relane paklen dope
Litik to

Etung Tikling performed the feat of bringing down the sun. But the other sun became very angry at the act of *Etung Tikling*. To the dismay of the people the sun disappeared, causing great hardships to them. Then they went on pleading with the sun to rise. At last, the sun agreed to rise on the condition that he might take away the lives of a few beings on the earth. The sun started to rise and the human being started to die. The sun that was shot down also started to rise as the moon.[6]

While narrating the creation or origin of *Donyi-Polo*, Talom Rukbo said, "All celestial bodies and earth are originated from one source – *Keyum*, according to *Aabangs* of the Adis. In simple meaning, *Keyum* is nothingness (vacuum) and from *Keyum-Yumkang, Kaamang, Mangor, Orbo, Bomong* (sun) *Boo* (moon) and other stars were developed through cosmic vibration and they remained on the above... Among these celestial planets *Bomong* (sun) became prominent exercising all powers of unseen *Donyi-Polo* and *Boo* (moon) remained nearest to earth playing a part of *Bomong*, as the partner giving life, light to living beings. Because of being the sole representative of the unseen *Donyi-Polo*, the name of *Bomong* (sun) and *Boo* (moon) are replaced with *Donyi-Polo* to carry the name of Supreme Being."[7] On these backgrounds, there are certain differences among the people over the issue of the term *Donyi-Polo*, being attached to as Indigenous religion.

Differences over Nomenclature

Since 1967, there had been long drawn debates over the question of *Donyi Polo* among the Adi intellectuals in different forums especially in the print media.[8] The majority of Adi intellectuals firmly believes and defends the fact that no other but *Donyi Polo* is the religion of the Adis. Justifying *Donyi Polo* as an indigenous religion, Oshong Ering, writes:

> *It is a fact established beyond doubt that through tradition the Adis and for that matter the Tanis ardently believe in the existence of a supreme power that overshadows the sky of their religio-spiritual aspiration who guides the destiny of man...they aspire through various medium but material and physical limitations cut them short and the beauty remained to be attained, ultimately the Adis have found a viable medium through which they attempt to attain the unattainable. This is the discovery of Donyi Polo. Equipping themselves with the light, rays and great qualities of Donyi Polo, the Adis and all the Tanis aspire high to arrive at the everest of glory. Donyi and Polo are the symbolic media of aspiration of the Adis.*[9]

Shri Pajing Pertin in his article entitled '*Adis faith through the ages*' strongly repudiated the very notion of Donyi Polo as the religion of Adis. According to him, *Sedi* is the supreme power that creates the entire universe and the human being too. Every thing including the sun and the moon (Donyi-Polo) comes into being at the wish of *Sedi*, the creator. He opined that the appropriate term for the Adi religion could be *Sedi* or *Sedism*. He was tooth and nail against the notion of *Donyi-Polo* as the indigenous religion of Adis. By citing the mythological background, he termed the *Donyi Polo* as man-eater. Pajing Pertin writes: 'A section of the Adis considers themselves as descendants of Donyi Polo! Some say 'Donyi Poloism' is a scientific religion. But the real scientific findings are that, the Donyi (sun) is a great fire burning in the sky. Then how could life originate from it? Let us consider that Ami (man) came from the Donyi Polo, then how will we explain or interpret that Sedi created Ami (man) in the blessed womb of Pedong Naane? How will we explain the words Donyi Polo?' [10] He further said: 'All about Donyi-Polo that appeared in the Arunachal News are not found in Adi mythical songs (Aabang-hymns). The Aabang is composed of songs of Sedi's creation and His glory. Where is the Aabang of Donyi Polo? It is found in the Penge Aabang (songs of lamentation) where Donyi is described as a man-eater and Polo as the day of death! Therefore, the theory of Donyi-Poloism is just like an egg without yolk! We have kept aside our fundamental faith (the yolk of the tribe) of Sedism. Alas! Can next generation come up without the real yolk?' [11] He strongly opposed the term Donyi-Polo to be used as religion: 'I appreciate the art and skill of pro-Donyi-Polo writers but regret deeply in my heart for the empty tombstone built in memory of the man-eater and the day of death (Donyi-Polo)... My beloved Adi brothers and sisters let us worship the truth (Sedi). When we worship the truth, the truth shall make us free from the grips of the man-eater (Donyi) and the Day of Death (Polo). Let us fix our eyes and mind on what is true, good and right and that's the right way to march on.'[12]

While supporting the views of Shri Pajing Pertin, Shri N.N.Osik writes: 'According to the Adi tradition (Aabangs), Sedi is the creator of all living beings including the sun (Donyi) and the moon (Polo). Thus Donyi and Polo are the handiworks of Him (Sedi) like those other creatures, for example human beings. It is absurd to acknowledge supremacy of a creation over its creator. It is a matter of regret that many of our brethren have recognized Donyi-Polo as the Almighty and exhilarated Donyi-Poloism as the religion of the Adis. Such misnomer and malicious exhibition, propagation and postulation are sure to injure the goodwill of Sedi, the Almighty, and adulterate the fair name of a religion.'[13] Shri Osik, in another article narrated a probable incident how the Donyi-Polo could have been called or named as the religion of Adi:

> *In the process, an Adi who came to New Delhi on a cultural meet has been asked by a Punjabi, 'What is your good name, mister? To what tribe and country do you belong? And what is your religion?' That very Adi guy might have replied to that wonder-struck Punjabi, 'My name is X, I belong to Arunachal Pradesh and am an Adi by tribe. But my religion is…i…s…!' He scratched his head to find out an appropriate answer and then bolted out, 'Oh yes! Donyi-Polo is our Almighty and the Donyi-Poloism is our religion'. He was imbued with the idea that there is no power on the earth who serves more than the sun. She provides us light and we call for her witness when any one of us is offended. He failed to understand that Sedi is the creator of all living things and Sedism is the religion of the Adis.*[14]

He further urged that the Adis and for that matter the Tanis: 'To shift the title of our religion from 'Donyi-Poloism' to 'Sedism'. In one hand if the word 'Sedi' sounds superfluous and 'Donyi-Polo' seems appropriate to majority of the believers, they are requested to carry out my suggestion that Donyi-Poloism is our religion, but the Tanis are not the worshipers of the sun and the moon, although in literal meaning the word 'Donyi-Polo' is the planetary sun and moon, 'Donyi-Polo' which we Tanis worship is far superior, far profound, far beyond and invisible. But any inculcation or cult of Donyi-Polo symbolizing the sun and the moon like Donyi-Polo Dere at Along and the medallion, 'Almighty Sun' should face massive resistance from enlightened and farsighted Tanis.'[15]

While reacting to the above argument, Shri Oshong Ering pointed out:

> *In his article Sri Osik has not made any distinction between the religion, cult, philosophy, logic, belief and faith. Without elaborating, we may say that Sedism is the philosophy and Donyi-Poloism the logical pursuit of the Adis. Sedi is the core of the philosophy. Donyi-Polo attempts to bring it to a logical conclusion. The spiritual aspiration and the search to find a logical answer come to stay as a channel of thought. This is the faith. Absence of systematic thought and logical search may be regarded as belief. A medium of aspiration when practiced may be ascribed as a cult. Religion is embodiment of all this. So, Sri Osik may justify whether Sedism be called the religion of the Adis?*[16]

Oshing Ering expressed his doubt about the authenticity of the story of two killer suns. The story or myth might be to relate or appreciate the greatness of the sun. But it does not mean that the sun be ascribed as bloodthirsty or killer of man which is a contradiction of popular belief and faith of the tribe. According to him Donyi-Polo is the embodiment of the spiritual aspect of the people and it is in abstract form. The physical sun and moon is representing the supreme power that we call Donyi-Polo who stands for truth, light, wisdom, equality and peace. Mr. M. Darin said, 'All the Adis had been accustomed to accept Donyi as a supernatural power although nobody knows who first introduced this doctrine. We are simply followers of our great forefathers. Any of our traditional Adi faiths or *Aabangs* did not indicate to accept *Sedi* as a supernatural power as Donyi had been accepted.'[17] To the Adis, *Sedi* signifies the physical manifestation of the universe. But *Sedi* is beyond the reach of the ordinary mortal and via media has been evolved in the conception of *Donyi-Polo*. 'The belief in Donyi-Polo is fundamental to the socio-cultural life of the Tanis and they feel that realization of god is possible only through Donyi-Polo which is the manifestation of sun, moon and earth therein also has the supreme truth, the divine strength of the Almighty.'[18] Nabam Atum said, "Among the Adis, Late Talom Rukbo was an icon for the promotion and propagation of *Donyi-Polo* as an Indigenous religion of the people. He had taken this religion to the World Religious Body and got it registered in International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) in the year 1981." In fact, Talom Rukbo had given practical shape to the *Donyi-Polo* faith. Under his guidance, a logical modes and methods of worshipping *Donyi-Polo* have been developed and numerous literatures to this effect have also been published. There is no doubt that *Donyi-Polo* has come to stay as an indigenous religion, because it has a deep-rooted socio-religious philosophy, which is vital living force to guide the people towards the spiritual destiny.

Nyishi Perception of Donyi Polo

The Nyishis do believe in Donyi-Polo but their notion is a bit different from that of Adis. Nyishis attach more importance to the *Donyi* than to the *Polo*, whereas among the Adis, the two words are synonymous or treated as same word. According to Nyishi myth, *Jingbu Pabu Abu*, the creator invoked *Beyang Chene Rolom* to create *Donyi* (sun) and *Paa Chene Rolom* to *Polo* (moon). After the creation, both *Donyi* and *Polo* were put in the heaven. It is believed that like Tanis there were so many *Donyis* such as *Ejang Jangter Donyi, Jangte Donyi,* *Jangkum Donyi, Donyi Yayi Chumji* etc. *Donyis* have their different world but there were continuous relationship among the *Donyis* and the *Tanis*. From the very beginning the Donyis were the well-wishers of the Tanis. There are so many instances where *Abo Tani* was saved or helped by *Ane Donyi*. To cite one such instance, once *Abo Tani* was put inside the *Dukam* (wooden coffin), meant for feeding a pig and thrown away to the *Saa Pabung* (Huge River) by none other than his own brother, *Robo Pacha*. *Abo Tani* helplessly sought help from every one who passed through him in the *Saa Pabung* but no one came forward to help him. He had sought help from *Atu Polo* (moon), who instead of helping him, charged Tani of being mischievous creature and straight way turned down his request. In this tragic situation, *Ane Donyi* passed through him and he once again sought help. *Ane Donyi* graciously helped him by breaking the coffin with her golden bangles and asked Tani to follow her ray that will lead him to reach his home. That is why the Nyishis do not treat Polo as benevolent. But by virtue of usefulness for counting time, month, season and year, Polo is also given importance. At the same time the word Polo is used as suffix to the word Donyi so as to add more meaning or weightage to the Donyi.

The Nyishis also believe that the human being is the progeny of Donyi and Tani. It is said *Abo Tani* entered into wedlock with *Jangte Ne* (Donyi-sun) who gave birth to *Nyia Tani* (real human being). Hence, Nyishi relates the Donyi with the creation and evolution of actual human race. It may be mentioned here that Tani was blessed with enormous power and authority as compared to the other living creatures on earth. He was notorious as well as curious by nature. He got married to almost all creatures in the universe and in the process many creatures became a progeny of Abo Tani. Others especially the Weyis did not like a big brother nature of his role. Time and again the *Weyis* tried to overpower and snatch such extra power and authority enjoyed by Tani. Due to his curious nature once he was completely dubbed by his adversaries. Once he got married to the daughter of *Donyi Ne*, namely *Donyi Yayi Chumji*. But their married life ended within a short period because in his mischievous nature, Tani could not be able to live up to the expectation of his wife. To enunciate the events, let us narrate the story. As she was in the advanced stage of pregnancy, *Donyi Yayi Chumji* asked *Tani* to bring a *Nabang* (child caretaker) from the distant place (*Kibo Riabo* country). By virtue of a daughter of *Ayi Donyi, Yayi Chumji* was a princess and she inherited some power (knowledge) to anticipate the danger ahead. Hence, before Tani left for the purpose, she cautioned him not to move in the right direction or right side of the river but to move towards the left bank. She also asked him not to respond to a person by name *Yuma Tada* (wretched person), who will try to befool or deceive him so as to rob the wealth of Tani. But Tani with his curious bent of mind did just opposite to what his wife had cautioned and ultimately he was physically robbed by that wretched man who turned himself wealthy man by rendering Tani to take his position (wretched man).

Tani was too ashamed to face his wife and hence he turned himself into a dog and reached his house. His wife was waiting all along without knowing that Tani had already reached the house in the form of a pet dog and lay besides her hearth. Afterwards, she could sense that Tani had done some thing mischievous and because of that he was ashamed of facing her and turned himself to a dog. So, she at once spit down and asked the dog to suck it if he was a real dog. At this, the dog did not respond. Now, she was convinced that the dog is none other than Tani himself and hence, she decided to flee away from him saying that a person like him cannot shoulder the responsibility of a family. With this incident, Tani practically became a wretched man. He was mentally and physically under pressure and at once decided to destroy the entire universe before he finishes himself. In this crucial moment, *Tu -Tugung* (benevolent deity) consoled and persuaded him not to take extreme step and advised him to go to *Ayi Donyi* once again. She can help him in restoring his power and position on the earth. Abo Tani reluctantly went to the kingdom of *Donyi Ne*. But he could not be able to gather courage to talk to his mother-in-law, face to face as he felt himself guilty. On top of this, his condition was horrible as he was living a wretched life, so he was ashamed of talking to her directly. When he reached the palace of *Ayi Donyi*, he saw *Jangte Ne*, (her daughter), weaving on the loom. She was very beautiful and attracted him but he was not in a position to talk to her face to face. Hence, he transformed himself into a bird to fly over *Jangte Ne* and leaked his sperm on her forehead. With this *Jangte Ne* became pregnant but she could not be able to realize the father of her would be child, as she did not have physical contact with any person.

By dint of her being beautiful, charming, and attractive and also belonging to a humble/noble family, *Jangte Ne* became a centre of attraction for all. Taking the benefit of innocence on the part of *Jangte Ne* about the father of her child, almost all ruling class and influential people started to claim the fatherhood of the child. Tani, too hesitantly placed his claim, as he knew well that the child is his real son. In comparison to the other claimants, Tani was too small and many of them dismissed even his right to claim. There was lot of competitions among the claimants of the child where Tani always took the last chance to compete but to the surprise of others he always became victorious. The other claimants refused to accept the succeeding verdict and they went on competing one after other. In the mean time *Jangte Ne* gave birth to a male child. Ultimately, *Jangte Ne* decided to invite all claimants for final trial by assigning the child to decide his own father. All people had gathered and Tani too took his seat at the extreme back side of the hall. Now, the child was asked to locate his father. The child after gazing all the gathered people patiently moved with a gentle crawling around the hall and finally wrapped Abu Tani and sat in his laps. With this, all the other claimants surrendered themselves and left the place. Later on, the child was named as *Nyia Tani*, whom the Nyishis believe to be the immediate (real human) forefather of the human race. In this way Nyishi attached Donyi in the evolution process of the human being.

In the strict sense of the term, *Donyi* is treated neither as creator nor as supreme power at least in the beginning but with her consistent benevolent gesture upon the human race, the man started realizing the inevitable nature of Donyi. The belief that *Donyi-Polo* watches all creatures both living and non-living in the universe and no one can escape from her sight has evolved a strong spiritual sense that *Donyi-Polo* is the supreme power on this universe. But interestingly people do not profess or worship *Donyi-Polo* separately in a pomp and show manner. During *Yullow* ceremony a ritual structure called *Sii-Donyi Weyi Yugang* (altar) is erected, where a fowl is sacrificed to symbolize the worshipping of *Donyi-Polo* god. In the light of this, Verrier Elwin described *Donyi-Polo* in the following ways:

> *Although this August being does not seem to have created the world, he reigns unchallenged in the heaven; he is the eye of the world; he is as important to man as the eye is to the body. He watches everything; he is witness of truth; he shows man the way to go; he protects them; he treats them with money. Above all, he is the lord of truth and an oath taken on her name is the most binding of all. Though he is not offered special sacrifices, for he does not need them, his name is invoked on every ritual occasion.*[19]

It may be mentioned here that the gender of *Donyi-Polo* is still a subject of confusion among the people. Some writes male as Elwin did while others write female and still others treat it as divine word having common gender. But traditionally the term *Donyi* (sun) is regarded as female while the term *Polo* is treated as male. In ordinary sense they can be called as a couple. In the Nyishi myths, there are so many instances where *Ayu Donyi* had helped and rescued Abo Tani during his difficulties. It is believed that, from the very beginning, all creatures including *Donyi-Polo* and human being were living together till a certain point of time. However, the continuous process of evolution ultimately led them to form difference and to take different way of life. In this long process Abo Tani had struggled a lot and he had also done so many mischiefs, which sometime rendered him in difficult situation even to the extent of finishing himself. But in all his difficult and trouble-time he was certainly rescued by *Ayu Donyi* in different ways. The traditional way of thinking is that *Donyi-Polo* is the eyes of human conscience.

Philosophy of Donyi Polo

The philosophical aspect of *Donyi-Polo* can be traced by analyzing the importance attached in regards to the behaviour, conduct, expression and various traditional myths and legends of the people who adhere to it. This searching and piercing eternal eyes watch the humanity ceaselessly. These eyes are represented through the sun and the moon for common or layman. Oshang Ering writes:

> *As the two objects in the sky focus light to enable us to see what is what, the eyes of conscience i.e. Donyi-Polo illuminate our mind to identify what is wrong and right. We may pretend to be doing something good to satiate ourselves and smile within ourselves after committing crimes, but right conscience continues to prevail upon us. In the corner of our privacy, we realize what we have done, right or wrong. Many may not establish fact due to lack of evidence, but forces of conscience disturb us, because we have deviated from the path of Donyi-Polo or conscience. Human being may not punish another fellow being, but Donyi-Polo imposes a psychological pressure on wrong doers. A person, after committing a theft or any crime, may pretend to be happy but in reality he/she is not a happy one.*[20]

In fact, the right conscience guides a man all the time and so, they generally abstain themselves from committing crime or wrong. According to the traditional belief, love, compassion, equality, selflessness, etc. are some of the ingredients of *Donyi-Polo*. Radiating and reflecting warming rays and kindly light through the sun and the moon, *Donyi-Polo* teaches human beings to be kind, compassionate, selfless and loving in conduct. Fundamentally, by *Donyi-Polo*, the traditions conceive of truth. Physical existence of the sun, the moon, the earth, the stars and the meteors are a truth. It shines all the time. No power in the universe can destroy the truth. It is unique and absolute in itself. *Donyi-Polo* is the purest of the pure, wisest of the wise and greatest of the great. Being so, it reins the intellectual sky of the tribe supreme. *Donyi-Polo* is a commonly used term among the people. In the village council, social gathering, public meeting and individual discussion, one will hear them pronouncing *Donyi-Polo*. This shows that consciously or unconsciously they adhere to the idea of truthfulness and purity. But at the same time if some one questions about the meaning and concept of *Donyi-Polo*, they become puzzled. In fact, in the midst of innumerable traditional myths and belief in benevolent and malevolent gods and goddesses, it becomes somewhat difficult for them to answer in a convincing manner. As the tradition has been handed down orally, common people become perplexed. But they say that *Donyi-Polo* means truthfulness. Beyond this, they cannot explain properly. Hence, to interpret it in true sense, one requires acquaintance with one's oral literature, myths, legends and practices. No one can claim to interpret it with full authority, as tradition itself is only a source for establishing authority.

However, many of the faiths and practices where actually the *Donyi-Polo* faith lies are being denounced as superstitious. These customs and practices are inconsistent to the present day world where scientific tampers rein the minds of the people. Thus reinterpretation and redefining of the traditional practices in tune with the changing reality of life are imminent. While pointing out this aspect, Late Talom Rukbo compared the stages of indigenous faith and belief with the Biblical notion of Old Testament and New Testament. According to him the traditional belief system is an Old Testament while the modified or changed one will be a New Testament. He said: 'Now the society needs a New Testament of Faith and Practices and to achieve it we need a revolutionary type of reformative action with modification, rectification, and reorganization to dig out the vital things. To do it, the society needs practice of spiritual aspiration for salvation. We have to give up unnecessary practices like animal sacrifice, taboo and worship to evil spirit. In these, there is no purification of heart, peace and strengthening of mentality, but full of dark and superstitions. To bring peace, confidence and strength in our mind we need a system of direct communication to Donyi-Polo.[21] While participating in a seminar, Late Lumar Dai, a profound believer of *Donyi-Polo* faith said, "Donyi-Polo is not attached to the physical sun and moon. It is a manifestation of a set of goodness omnipotent, omnipresent, truth, justice, love, compassion and above all solace for all human race during the distress or time of hardship."

II

Indigenous Religious movement

The movement for forging religious identity based on indigenous tradition forms an important aspect of the study. Among the Nyishis, the revival of faith in *Donyi-Polo* practically began from the early part of 1990's. The increasing trend of Christian converts among the people and the subsequent erosion of the indigenous customs and practices have created concern for like-minded people. Indifferent attitude on the part of some people towards the age-old culture and tradition thereby imminent possibility of losing it, has also necessitated the urgency of reviving and promoting the indigenous system. Organizations such as *'Tani Jagriti, Arunachal Pradesh Priests Association* (now renamed as *Arunachal Pradesh Nyobu Welfare Association*), *Nyishi culture society* etc.' sprang up in these years whose main thrust was to preserve and promote the indigenous customs and traditions of the community. However, after initial enthusiasm, these organizations practically became defunct in the later stage and hence, the movement could not be carried forward. In later part of 1990s, initiations were forthcoming from a few people of whom a special mention may be made to Mr. Nabam Tata, Tedi Techi, Techi Gobin, Nabam Atum, Kamen Ringu, Tana Rekhi etc. Need for the revival of faith and culture was urgently felt by the people, and for that a formal forum was required to carry out the movement. To discuss the idea in the broader perspective, a general convention was held on 3rd April' 1999 at Arunachal University campus. In this historic meeting it was unanimously decided to revive and revitalize the society, which is already in existence but with modification in its nomenclature. It was also decided that the new name of the society shall be *'Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Culture Society'* (NIFCS). This Society shall aim at preserving, promoting and popularizing the age-old customs, traditions, faiths and practices. It also aims at reforming, through necessary changes and modifications without undermining the value system of those traditions and culture. The motto shall be *"preserve, promote and propagate indigenous faith and culture'* and the instilling slogan shall be *'loss of faith is loss of culture, loss of culture is loss of identity.'*[22]

With the formation of this society a new twist was given to the revivalist movements particularly in the field of religious belief among the Nyishis. It may be mentioned here that the Adis have already formalized the Donyi-Polo faith as an indigenous religious faith and propagated it through *Donyi-Polo Yelam Kebang*. The Nyishis too believe in *Donyi-Polo* faith but it was not practically taken off in a proper form and people were in a fix as to what exactly would be this so-called 'Indigenous religion'. A need for formal teaching and preaching was urgently and inevitably felt among the people. The NIFCS being broader forum as is indicated in its nomenclature cannot afford to take up the specific issue of religion, which requires complete devotion and commitment. Hence, *Nyedar Namlo* (literal meaning - spiritual house), a purely religious body was established on 27th January 2001 at Doimukh under the aegis of Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Culture Society. In the words of Tana Showren:

> *The word Nyedar is a Nyishi word, which literally means 'pure or clean'. The other word Namlo means 'Palace or Sacred Home', and in the present context the 'followers of Aabh Tani, first ancestor of Nyishi and worshiper of Aan Donyi'. These two words are equally applicable to compound meaning, 'the Home of Pure'. In general the Nyedar Namlo has been used for those, who are devoted to Aan Donyi and followers of Aabh Tani called 'Tanism'. Thus, the term Nyedar Namlo has been come to acquire a special connotation in relation to evolution of the Nyishi indigenous religion and culture.*[23]

The man behind the movement is Mr. Nabam Tata, one of the known figures in the field of socio-cultural aspect of the Nyishis. He initiated the move and practically conducts the proceedings of the *Nyedar Namlo*. He may not be necessarily treated as a spiritual leader but he may be identified as religious leader who aims at reforming, revitalizing thereby to promote and popularize the Indigenous Faith among the people. Mr. Tata, son of late Nabam Tapi, hails from Kebi village under Yazalee Administrative Circle in Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh. When I enquired about his deep interest/inclination in leading the spiritual life, he spontaneously reacted stating that he had long history behind this. He narrated the event, which inspired him to start indigenous way of treating/diagnosing the physical as well as mental problems. Since the later part of 1980's, he had regular dreams, seeing only the same place located in his village. The place is a sloppy piece of land where he used to play along with his friends at his tender age. Whenever he saw this dream he felt restless both physically and mentally. He had gone for a number of rituals and sacrifices but the problem of seeing the dream persisted. Once in early 1990s, he met with an accident in which his shoulder got fractured. He employed local priest to cure the ailment. But mentally he was disturbed and at the same time the unwanted dream continued. He invited Mr. Deba Taro, a priest from same locality mainly to ascertain what could be the best possible way to get rid of the problem. By invoking numerous chicken lever examinations, he suggested that only a simple ritual and sacrifices involving killing of about ten to fifteen fowls would serve the purpose. Accordingly, the priest performed the ritual at his native village as desired. With his utter surprise, after this simple ritual he did not see the said dream again and he also felt better. In other words, all his anxiety and mental agony were wiped out.

Now, he started questioning himself within his heart, like what could be the best form/way to spirituality? He was quite convinced that all human problems relating to both physical and mental could be effectively dealt through indigenous faith and belief system. But he also fully realized that in this changed society the present priest centered system couldn't stand to solve the problem. According to him a common man cannot afford to sustain the elaborate ritual system, which involves lot of expenses by means of sacrifices and other expenditure. At the same time the priestly class is also diminishing, as practically only a few are inclined to this field. His firm belief in indigenous faith and the complex nature of the present priest system compelled him to think in terms of evolving a modified but simpler form of religious practices. The method of worship he propounded is very easy which even a layman can also practice. The method is based on concentration with enchantment, which is not exactly a meditation. Through enchantment different powers which were employed for the creation of a man (all parts of human body) are invoked and sought their services for healing and treatment of different human ailments. *Ane Donyi* is treated as principal deity who would use the concerned powers or devices for the well being of the mankind. The philosophical/spiritual word goes like this:

Atur tow Ane Donyie

Changtum Bute, Langku Kamkue

Jiglo Bulo, Langte Bute

Nyikum Tani, Jingkum Eji

Dumri Chijilo

Here the entire parts of the body from feet to forehead are described in chronological manner. This is also something like a prayer telling the problem and narrating the instances of solving such problem with the grace of almighty thereby seeking similar help. Mr. Tata said, 'he had successfully treated his own mother who was almost bedridden.'

The *Nyedar Namlo* organizes regular prayer meeting in a fixed place like those of Church and Temple. The branches are now established at many places like Yazalee, Palin, Kimin, Balijan, Itanagar, and Naharlagun, which are centrally placed under the guidance of Doimukh *Nyedar Namlo*. Through this forum the entire religious activities are being streamlined. It shall deconstruct and interpret/reinterpret logically the vast philosophical and spiritual aspect of the indigenous faith and belief system. It has been trying to evolve a viable as well as simpler method of worshipping the *Donyi-Polo* (god or almighty). On every Sunday, a regular prayer, concentration and preaching takes place in the respective Nyedar Namlo. The materials used in these spiritual activities include *Taki* (Ginger), *Etang* (rice flour), *Kokam Ukhu* (conical shape leaf), *Dup* (brace bamboo) and *Esi* (water). As the Nyishis emphasize more on *Donyi* (the sun), the painted image is generally displayed inside the *Nyedar Namlo*. In their prayer also unlike the Adis they hardly use the term Polo (the moon). They call *'Attur to Ayi Donyi'* (blessed be the Ayi Donyi - goddess). In this way, we may find that roughly two sects are emerging out of the broader form of *Donyi-Polo* faith. Nevertheless, philosophically there is hardly any difference as the two groups basically accepted *Donyi-Polo* as the Almighty power on this universe. The mythological background relating to origin, evolution and role of *Donyi-Polo* is also more or less same. With the formation of *Nyedar Namlo*, a formal preaching on *Donyi-Polo* faith is being ushered among the Nyishis. Workshops and specific trainings are imparted on methods and tenets of the indigenous religion which are being conducted periodically under the aegis of central 'Nyedar Namlo Committee'. It has tried to usher certain process of selection and accommodation of the traditional belief systems without undermining the basic aspect of spirituality thereby filling up the gap (vacuum) between the old traditional method of worship and the new, modern and alien form of religions. It is a fact that the indigenous faith and belief has been dismissed all the time on the ground that it does not have institutionalized or formalized system. In any case the evolution of *Nyedar Namlo* will definitely give new trend and new direction to the religious aspect of the people.

Now many are showing enthusiasm in the *Nyedar Namlo* movement. It is worth mentioning that even a few Christian converts have also come back to their original fold. Shri Taba Tahi of Jote Village has narrated the reason why he had given up Christianity: "I had been a Christian for last 17 (seventeen) years but to be frank I was not a committed Christian. I have a total of twelve members in my family, which include my three wives and eight children. Two years back, my fifth son fell ill seriously. Despite all efforts from our Christian brothers, his condition did not improve. I have taken him to Medical College, Vellore in Madras but there was no significant improvement. While reaching here, I consulted a few priests and they suggested that I should go for rituals, which will involve a sacrifice of mithun. Accordingly, I had done the *Weyi Panam* and since then my son has recovered. So I have become a changed man." Similarly, Shri Techi Murkhi narrated: "I was one of the most disciplined and committed Christian in my village. I had worked as pastor for many years. But a remarkable incident happened to me, which entirely changed my perception on Christianity. It was in early 1990s, I met with an accident where I received multiple fractures on my leg. I was rushed to General Hospital, Naharlagun. The Doctor told me that my leg has to be operated and it will take minimum six months for recovery. I was scared and felt restless. Then a few of my relatives advised me to try Nyishi Nyob (local priest) for performing *Jeri nanam* (healing through chanting). I reluctantly agreed and the priest conducted the Jeri. Quite surprised, my leg was healed and I could able to walk after two weeks. So, this miracle enabled me to realize the fact that the priest and for that matter, the indigenous religion is not less than any other religion. Hence, I gave up Christianity and now become loyal to my own tradition and religion."

As we know Arunachal Pradesh is the land, inhabited by numerous ethnic groups having distinct tradition and culture of their own. However, some of their customs, traditions, usages, faiths and belief systems are inconsistent to the present situation. The new generations are practically not in a position to cope-up the old system and sometime they dismiss it as sheer superstitious in nature. Adding to this, there has been increasing cases of religious conversion among the Arunachalese due to which the indigenous faith and culture are at stake. Almost all tribal communities are facing the same situation throughout the state. An opinion has been built up among the like-minded people for quite sometime, to form statewide organization. Therefore, in order to channelize the movement for preservation, promotion and propagation of indigenous belief system and culture throughout the state, an organization called 'Indigenous Faith and Culture Society of Arunachal Pradesh' (IFCSAP) was formed at the first ever state level Indigenous Convention held at Naharlagun on 27th & 28th December'1999.[24] The IFCSAP is basically a conglomeration of all faiths and cultures, which are indigenous in nature. The basic aim of this society is to forge a united movement for cultural and religious revival among the people. It has a unit in every district of Arunachal Pradesh to co-ordinate the activities of the society. Creating awareness among the people about the vast treasure of age-old custom and tradition is the main thrust of the society. For this purpose IFCSAP has been organizing seminars/ symposia, debates, public meetings, mass gatherings etc. Recently too, they successfully organized a three day cultural festival from May 21, to May 23' 2002 at Naharlagun, where almost all tribes participated with their colourful cultural troupes.

Success and popularity of any organization or society entirely lies in its farsightedness, tolerance and accommodative nature. However, it seems that IFCSAP is vocal in opposing the Christian Missionaries and they sometime charge missionaries of converting innocent children in the mission schools.[25] Since its formation the IFCSAP has been consistently demanding the implementation of 'Arunachal Pradesh Indigenous Faith Act 1978' in toto. In this way a sense of indifference and hesitation has been created among the people as such none of the public figures especially the elected leaders dared to join the recently concluded Indigenous Cultural Festival at Naharlagun in the State Capital.[26] A new development is taking place over the last few years. The Christians have been organizing inter-denomination caroling as well as taking out procession in the roads and streets of State Capital on the 'Eve of Christmas Celebration'. One may presume that it might be a counter productive or reaction to the move of the IFCSAP and if so it will be unfortunate for the common people of the state. The interest of the people and the state squarely lies on peaceful co-existence among all cross sections of the society. The need of the hour is to maintain complete restrain on the part of those organizations that belong to different socio-religious backgrounds.

III

Influence of Hinduism on Indigenous Religious Movement

The influence of majority community on minority community is a general phenomenon in every society. But the difference is only in degree. The extent of these influences may vary from one society to the other. Hence, to what extent these influences are there in a given society needs to be ascertained and analyzed with certain framework. Hinduism being a dominant religious community in India has undoubtedly influenced almost all minority religious communities directly or indirectly. So far as the tribal religion is concerned there are so many similarities that sometime it (tribal-religion) has been defined as crude form of Hinduism. At the same time there are also strong points of dissimilarities, which cannot be easily dismissed. There has been quite long history of tribals being used, suppressed and exploited by the dominant or ruling classes in the society. But in case of the tribes in northeast India especially Arunachal Pradesh, it is quite different. They could maintain their distinct identity till recently as they were in isolation and no ruler including the Ahom and the British could rule them. In fact they have evolved an open society where there is no place for class division or caste system in its social, political or religious sphere. Their faith and practices are purely need based which evolved out of their interaction with nature and natural objects. As Elwin said:

> *I doubt if the NEFA people will accept Hinduism in any organized manner. Between them and that great religion stands the gentle figure of the cow. Yet there are many things, which should attract them in popular Hinduism; the same belief in a supreme deity ruling over a host of lesser spirits; the same sacrifices; the same colourful festivals; myths and legends of a rather similar pattern. But the tribal people, even the educated ones, will not give up their mithun, beef and beer; they are likely to reject the caste system, the new and unfamiliar taboos, the prevailing Puritanism.*[27]

Similarly, B.K. Shukla writes:

> *Today Dafla society is not faced with the danger of losing its traditional values. No doubt, in most parts of the world contact has created problems. This is especially true of the tribes of central India, for example. The Gonds and Baigas are no longer what they were a century ago. They took to the Hindu ways of life; their religion and social structure were changed. The total outcome, however, has been frustration. They lost their own cultural values without fully assimilating those of the dominant culture. This problem, however, does not exist among the Daflas, at least for the present. Their religion, social institutions and social codes are respected; their arts are promoted and considered as matter of pride.*[28]

During the initial years after Independence, the government of India had maintained a careful watch in order to restrict all kinds of religious activities other than the practice of tribal religion. Verrier Elwin strongly advocated the continuance, preservation and promotion of tribal religion and opposed the undue entry of other form of religions in NEFA. He writes: 'The deeper study of the tribal religions ... shows that they have many elements that satisfy the heart, even though, like other religions, they have other elements, which do not satisfy the mind. We should be able to provide a climate in which the old religions can grow and reform themselves from within so that ultimately there will be in NEFA religious concepts that will be truly in character, yet having a wider view and a pure conception of god and man.'[29]

The officials of the NEFA Administration were directed to observe a policy of strict religious neutrality and were advised not to impose even tribal religion on those who did not want it. They were directed to take exactly the same attitude to Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim missionaries as it did to the Christian missionaries.[30] No religious bodies, whether they are Buddhists, Hindus, or Christian Evangelists were allowed to settle, to own land, or to make public propaganda without prior approval of the local administration. The NEFA administration also emphasized the need to restrict the activities of the American Baptist Mission, which was believed to offer tacit support to the activities of anti-government organizations.[31] Regarding the change in culture, the administration held that, 'change will come everywhere even in the remotest places and our task is not to check it but to guide it in order to help them to evolve a truly tribal culture.'[32] After the Indian debacle in the Sino-Indian war in 1962, the Nehru-Elwin policy based on 'revivalist-protectionist approach' was replaced by 'progressive integration', with active and speedy administrative penetration into the NEFA.[33]

The government also effected changes in its religious policy where for the first time the Ramakrishna Mission was invited to work among the tribals of NEFA. The Mission school was opened at Along in 1966 and subsequently the Ramakrishna Mission extended its network in other parts of NEFA as well. Apart from the Ramakrishna Mission, a few other Hindu religious organizations were also allowed to make an easy access in NEFA since the late sixties. One can argue that the government had good intention of imparting education to the illiterate people because by that time the administration was convinced that without proper education the development in NEFA is next to impossible. But in contrast, unlike Hindu and pro-Hindu organizations, the Christian Missions did not find any easy entry into the soil of NEFA. Perhaps their role in other northeastern states especially in Nagaland and Mizoram where they were suspicious of provoking and encouraging the secessionist's element had worked behind the virtual ban of their activities in NEFA. 'Following the rapid growth of activities of the Hindu missions, many Hindu gods and goddesses seem to have been adopted by the local tribal population. Not only the pupils reading in the Hindu missionaries schools, but in other government as well as private schools take active part in the worship of goddess Saraswati, the Hindu goddess symbolizing learning and knowledge.'[34] Although the Hindu missions do not formally convert the tribals but their loosely organized religious practices are viewed as one of the various shades of Hinduism.

As far as conversion and influence is concerned except Christianity and Hinduism other religious communities are practically negligible and are unknown to the people. Both the communities have been accusing and blaming each other of destroying and endangering the indigenous faith and belief system. As regard to Christianity, there is direct conversion and the converts generally cease to perform the traditional rituals, sacrifices, faith and practices. In this way, they are identifiable and thus have separate religious identity. The Hinduism does not go for direct conversion but tacitly influences them so as to assimilate their religious belief to the Hindu fold. Their dominant discourse is that Christianity is an alien or foreign religion whereas the Hinduism is an indigenous or Indian religion. In this way they have considerably instilled suspicion or hesitation in the minds of the people. But this argument hardly convinces those who are sensible and soundly educated because they understand it very well that neither Christianity nor Hinduism has ever been indigenous religion for the nature-worshipping Arunachalese. Hence both of these religions are equally alien to the indigenous people. The only difference is that earlier the government had favourable and encouraging attitude towards Hinduism and allowed its missionaries to carry out their activities in the state while on the other hand the entry of the Christian Missionaries was almost banned. Due to this discrimination, Christian Missionaries came very late in Arunachal despite its praiseworthy role especially in education and health care in several neighbouring states including Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram etc.

The other factor responsible for the prominent influence of Hinduism on the people of Arunachal Pradesh is that the Hindu adherents were the first among the outsiders to come to Arunachal. This includes the government employees, businessmen and teachers in both private and government schools. Naturally the aborigines – most of whom were ignorant and practically lacked education till 1950 got easily influenced as in course of transactions and official interactions they had to meet and come in close contact with these people frequently, either to make business or to buy essentials of life or to make any official dealings or to educate their children. The people at large are taking active part in Puja celebrations like – Sarswati Puja, Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Vishwakarma Puja, Holi, Dussera etc. And teachers, to some extent, are also responsible for influencing their faith on the innocent school children. It is seen that most often the primary teachers while enrolling the students on the school register would tend to change either fully or partially the names of the children. This is being applied by both the adherents of Hindu as well as Christians, for example Takam Sanjay, Toko Rajesh, Toko Anil, Nabam Vishal, Nabam Vishnu, Nabam Ram etc. and Dominic Tadar, Techi Paul, Nabam Ruth, Tana Soul, Nabam Joseph etc. respectively. However, nothing can be generalized, as all the Hindu brothers working in Arunachal Pradesh cannot be termed indifferent or malicious intention to indigenous faith and culture. There are quite a good number of different religious adherents who are progressive and have deep respect for the indigenous belief system and recognized its distinct features. Such secular minded people always oppose any sort of imposition or assimilation of their religion in the aborigines.

Nevertheless, it is an undeniable fact that several Hindu organizations including Ramakrishna Missions, Vivekananda Misions, Sharda Missions and Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalayas are giving yeoman services to the people especially in the field of education and health care. But still there are many Hindu organizations like Rastrya Syamsevak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, Arunachal Vikas Parishad, Banwasi Kalyan Ashram, Nari Kalyan Kendra, Durga Vahini, Mahesh Jogi Ashram, Brahmma Kumari Vishwavidyalay, Shanti Kunj Ashram etc. with their committed agents and workers are trying their best to impose or assimilate some Hindu elements into the indigenous faith and belief system of the people. This irrefutable truth is well evidenced with the fact that today a sizeable number of Arunachalese including top politicians, bureaucrats, technocrats, business communities, doctors, teachers and even students are either regular members or sympathizers of various Hindu organizations and some of them worship and put statues of Hindu gods and goddesses in their homes and establishments. There is some inclination towards the Hindu way of life when we closely study the attitude and behavioural pattern of the people. Some people used to go to the Hindu priest or *sadhu* who generally foretells impending events and suggest remedies to overcome such danger. Usually these priests advise the people to put on *tabbies* or finger rings minted with certain things inside it with a prescription that it would certainly protect a person from the danger and it may also lead one to fortune. Almost all politicians and even the top bureaucrats tend to consult these priests. During election, the candidates go from one priest to another so as to ascertain their victory and sometime spend huge amount in the venture. For naming, a newly born child is also taken to the priest who advises certain name by seeing the *Rashi* of a child. At Pasighat in East Siang District, a large number of people throng to a Nepalese priest for naming the newborn child.

In the context of Arunachal Pradesh as a whole, the activities of Hindu religion have knowingly or unknowingly played as restraining force for mass conversion to Christianity. Interestingly the indigenous populace did not resist the entry of Hindu missions except a few instances of expressing reservation in the print media. While reacting to the Lt. Governor's address to the newly constituted Assembly in 1978, Shri Orin Lego cautioned the government and the people of Arunachal Pradesh:

> *In his address, the Lt. Governor said that this Government was fully alive to the important questions of preservation and promotion of traditional cultures and faiths of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. But it is a matter of regret that our Govt. seems to be unaware of 'Missions' in Arunachal Pradesh. It is heard that the head of the R.K. Mission Along, gives most importance to Hinduism while dealing with the students. He wants that even the magazine of the school should be dominated by articles on Hinduism. He has forgotten that he is in Arunachal Pradesh where people have their own customs and traditions. Of course we know that his is a Mission. He is to impart spiritual knowledge also to the students. But it does not mean that he should try his level best to convert the tribal students to Hinduism. We also believe in God but we have our own ways. He should only make the tribal students God-fearing as there is God but not Hindus or Christians.*[35]

As we have seen that the Hindus do not go for formal or mass conversion in Arunachal Pradesh, instead they try to assimilate some of the Hindu faith and belief into the indigenous religious fold. It may be seen that wherever Hindu influences are there the Christian conversion is less. Take for example in Lohit Valley being a seat of Hindu pilgrimage at Parusuramkund, the Christian influence is very little and similarly in Along being the first Mission centre of Hindu wing, conversion to Christianity is effectively checked. The 1991 census has returned with a few Mishmis converted to Hinduism in Lohit District.[36] However, there is no report of formal conversion to Hindu fold by the local people throughout the state. Among the Nyishis too, no such case is reported till date. But there are instances where a few individuals have connections with the Bahudeo Shankaracharya in the adjoining villages of Assam mainly for treatment of ailments. These individuals do not have any clear idea about the religion and even they don't know that Shankaracharya is under Hindu fold. One such individual was Late Techi Kuli of Khemlee village under Sagalee Circle who had later on become ardent believer and lived the life of almost a Hindu saint. Before his death, he firmly advised his family members that his last rite should be performed as per the Hindu tradition and he was cremated with appropriate rituals. Mr. T.C. Tok pointed out, 'as per the Nyishi custom and tradition, dead body is always buried and incidentally he was the first person to be cremated among the Nyishis and it has definitely surprised many people.' Except this incident there is no information of Nyishis being converted to Hindu religion as neither the Hindu organizations nor the individual concerned revealed it.

Nevertheless, for the last one decade, there has been quite rapid growth of Hindu based organizations and the temples too especially in the twin capital city of Itanagar and Naharlagun. A rough survey was conducted in these cities to find out the intensity of the growth of Temple, Church, Mosque and Gurudwara. The following are the details revealed in the survey:

Table 6.1: Comparative strength of religious places at Itanagar and Naharlagun

Year	*Temple*	*Church*	*Mosque*	*Gurudwara*
1992	04	04	02	01
2002	25	14	04	02

(*Source*: Computed on the basis of field survey)

The statistics reveal that the Hindu Temple is numerically far ahead, followed by Christian Churches, whereas other two are almost negligible. Organization wise also the pro-Hindu is well ahead of the others as the survey revealed that there are as many as 15 such organizations working in the state. It is pertinent to note that out of these four religious communities, only the local people manage the Christian Churches whereas other three including the Hindu Temples are purely managed and looked after by the outsiders or non-Arunachalese. As far as the influences and activities of Hindu based organizations are concerned, some are very active while others are in dormant stage. The contributions of Vivekananda Kendra Vidhyalaya (VKV) Missions, especially in the field of education cannot be under rated. Being a pioneer in education sector it has immensely contributed in the development of human resources in the state. Similarly, the R.K. Mission is also giving yeoman service to the needy and downtrodden people of the society in the field of education and health care. The Akhil Vikas Parishad (AVP) under the disguised nomenclature of Arunachal Vikas Parishad too, is doing yeoman services to the needy people in the form of relief and rehabilitation. The Vivekanand Kendra Arunjyoti (VKA) is actively involved in creating awareness among the rural folk and they are vocal in opposing the Christianity. While participating in a seminar, Miss Sujata Naik, an activist of Vivekanad Arujyoti, termed Christianity as 'Foreign or Western Religion' and defended Hinduism as 'Hindustan, Karma or way of life.' These organizations openly enroll the local youths and through them they carry out their works. But how far they have achieved in their mission and whether the local youths are inclined to or embraced to Hindu fold is still to be properly studied and seen.

The Hindu based organizations are being accused of having undue association with the Indigenous organizations such as *Donyi-Polo Mission* (DPM), *Donyi-Polo Yelam Kebang* (DPYK), *Arunachal Pradesh Nyobu Welfare Association* (APNWA), *Indigenous Faith and Culture Society of Arunachal Pradesh* (IFCSAP), *Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Culture Society* (NIFCS) etc. and thereby try to assimilate or induct some Hindu elements into the tribal religion. These organizations are charged to the extent of financially helping the so-called indigenous organizations for their sheer vested interest. In the name of Indigenous faiths/organizations, the pamphlets, posters, cards, photos, calendars etc. are clandestinely published by Hindu based organizations and circulated among the selected people. For example the priest's nameplate is inscribed with VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) and similarly under the name of Hindu based organizations, the postcard and calendar of *Nyedar Namlo* are recently published. There is open participation of the functionaries of Hindu wings in the functions of the indigenous religious organizations. They are some time formally invited to deliver a talk in the indigenous religious functions including in the *Nyedar Namlo.* In one of such function at Doimukh Nyedar Namlo, Swami Vishwatmananda, Maharaj of Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar said:

> *'I am joining the first ever Donyi-Polo prayer function here today; while joining here, I feel that I am not attending other religious function but in my own religion. In our religion, the same arrangement is made like here. As I said, I am sitting here in my own religion; yesterday evening we had Ram Kirtan at RKM, Hospital Itanagar and while in deep meditation, I asked my Guru (god) to show me a path or way how I could talk about spirituality at Doimukh, where I am being invited. Donyi or Suryo is a part of Hindu religion. In Hindu religion, Ram and Krishna are the principal gods or embodiment of Hindu Gods. Like wise, Donyi and Polo are the embodiment of tribal religion. This is nothing but a brother religion of a Hindu and is inseparable part of a Hindu. I have read a book on Donyi-Polo written by Oshang Ering and I believe that there is hardly any difference between Hindu and Donyi-Polo religion. Gayatrimantra in Hindu religion is a devotion or prayer to sun. This is why Donyi-Polo or sun-moon God is inseparable to Hindu religion.'*

In this way the Hindu functionaries are openly campaigning that *Donyi-Polo* is a part of their religion and on that line they try to assimilate/accommodate some of the Hindu elements into the tribal religion. But in contrast other religious leaders are not formally associated and welcomed in these functions.

Some people have pointed out that the using of *Dup Duna* and utterances of *owm* sound in the proceedings of *Nyedar Namlo* is purely a Hindu influence. In this way the inner value of the term indigenous or originality is being defeated even in the eye of a layman who does not embrace other religion but wish to retain his own religion. When asked about these accusations, the founders of *Nyedar Namlo* reacted that there is no harm in accepting some genuine or useful methods/principles from other faith. They did not openly admit that the indigenous religion is akin to or the part of the Hindu religion but they tend to agree in their whisperings among themselves. Such attitude on their part has created a sense of discomfiture or doubt especially among the likeminded people of the society. Because of that, many people who are genuinely interested in their indigenous faith and practices are hesitant to openly join in *Nyedar Namlo* or other religious functions. These people argue that if we are to retain our indigenous religion, we must maintain it in its original form and we should avoid closely association or assimilation with other religious group. There should be no admixture or imitation from any other religion, which will dilute the meaning and sanctity of our indigenous faith and belief system. At the most we can effect some changes through reform but not necessarily by copying, the elements from other religion. Similarity and dissimilarity is quite common among the different religions but one should not take it as a yardstick to claim and denounce the tribal religion. As Ramakrisha Paramhans taught, there are several routes/paths through which one can reach to god. Any person who asks god with all dedication, truth and righteousness, he/she will definitely acquire the blessing of god or attain salvation irrespective of the religious sect he/she followed.

For sound growth and posterity of the indigenous religion, there must be plain and open discussion among the cross-section of the people. A constructive criticism should be always welcomed which helps in evolving an acceptable as well as compatible religious tradition. Despite some imminent drawbacks, the *Nyedar Namlo* and for that matter the *Donyi-Polo* religion is bound to stay as it is being accepted as the indigenous religion of the Tani group of tribes in the state. No religious tenets or principles of any religion is fully accepted and adhered to in totality by the believers. All religions throughout the world had witnessed different stages of change and continuity. Similarly, the *Donyi-Polo* religion is also undergoing reformations and a day will come when it may become one of the viable and acceptable religions in the realms of human civilizations.

To sum up, some of the indigenous intellectuals from the Adi tribe among the Tani group of tribes started developing new religious movements, namely, *Donyi-Poloism* to defend their indigenous belief system. Among the Nyishis also an organization, namely, Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Culture Society (NIFCS) launched a similar movement for the preservation and promotion of indigenous culture and religion. The launching of *Nyedar Namlo* movement has been the offshoot of such an effort. Through this movement, consistent efforts are being made to transform the existing religious practices to a more viable and institutionalize one.

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7

CONCLUDING REMARKS WITHOUT CONCLUSIONS

I

Since the dawn of independence, Arunachalese are witnessing remarkable changes in almost all aspects of their life. In the field of religion, the indigenous tribes including the Nyishis are passing through a transitional phase. Traditional religious belief of Nyishi was an integral part of the total ongoing way of life and it was never experienced as something separable from the rest of the pattern. No specific distinction can be made between the social and religious functions. Their religious belief is expressed in their myths, legends, folklore and rituals. Traditionally, the Nyishi's conception of religion is different from those of the organized religions. Their religious belief system is invariably vested on the belief of *Weyi* and *Oram* (spirits), wedded with both benevolent and malevolent powers. They believe in harmony as well as equilibrium in the dealings and interactions among the man, nature and the unseen powers. In the event of wrong dealing or discrimination, the spirit may turn hostile to the human being and they may create trouble in any form: such as miseries, hardships, diseases, death and natural calamities like drought, famine, earthquake, and so on and so forth. This could be done away only through appeasement and appropriate propitiation through rituals and sacrifices. There are varied and long processes of dealing with the spirits through the well-established institution of priesthood. According to Nyishi tradition, the priesthood is not vested through inheritance. Any person who has inborn qualities and gets divine vision can become a priest. No formal training is imparted to a priest. A priest carries out his services through various modes and methods of divination, which are spiritually evolved out of conventions and practices. By virtue of their indispensable and yeoman services, the priests have always been honoured, respected and acknowledged in the society.

However, this religious belief system has been undergoing changes as a result of the introduction of modern state system and market economy in the post-independent period. Till today, economy of the Nyishi is pivoted round the shifting (jhum) agriculture though at present, the practice of settled cultivation (wet rice cultivation) has also created a space on their traditional agrarian based economy. The traditional mode of economic transaction in trade and commerce was basically based on barter system. Undoubtedly, the introduction of monetary economy is a post-independent phenomenon and it has changed the entire scenario of the tribal economic system. With the administrative reforms and welfare measures of the state, the people came in touch with various exogenous forces of change and gradually they started operating within the wider market system, which was hitherto unknown to them. The significant exogenous force is of course the state induced change through road, transportation, communication and most importantly the coming up of district headquarters, administrative centres and the corresponding growth of towns or semi-towns. The 'model-policy' of protective development efforts, has involved the local Nyishis to associate themselves in different developmental works and naturally a few of them have started earning money mainly through contract works. It has opened a market for their labour along with some other fresh expectations of diversified avenues for earning cash.

It has also paved the way for the development of entrepreneurships among the Nyishis, though some of the shops or business establishments are leased out to the non-tribal people. The coming up of local market poured with outside products has reduced the importance of their traditional trade and mechanism of barter economy as they can purchase essential commodities from the local market. Emergence of such market and linkages with monetary economy have extended their consumption agenda though the basic agrarian structure is yet to make any significant departure in terms of organization of production, cropping pattern, management of land and labour and improved agricultural inputs. Evidently, there is gradual inclination towards the individualization of land including the cultivable ones but a tradition of community ownership is also still in vogue especially in the rural villages. Except in urban areas, the land has not yet become a cheap commodity by which any people can accumulate through money capital. Moreover, the transfer of land is restricted within the tribe itself and as such it is yet to be encroached by moneylenders or non-Arunachalese.

The modern education has been the most viable agent for social, economic, political and religious changes among the Nyishis. They started taking to education quite late as compared to many other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Prior to 1948, no singe formal educational institution was there in the Nyishi belt. As majority of the Nyishis inhabit in the isolated and landlocked interior hilly regions, their response to the modern education was not encouraging even after a couple of decades of independence. It has a clear impact on the overall development of the Nyishis vis-a-vis the other tribes of the state. Nevertheless, since 1970, there was spurt of socio-cultural and literacy movement under the aegis of the first generation of educated Nyishi youths. Consequently, the introduction of formal education-system has created provision for white-collar jobs for a few Nyishis, who were in a position to pursue their higher education beyond higher secondary and degree levels. But due to structural and functional constraints with which existing educational system is suffering, it has created some marginally educated Nyishi boys and girls with different occupational expectations. They are neither in a position to get any jobs nor willing to revert back to their traditional shifting agriculture. This has become a loss of labour-force for many families who were oscillating between two social realities. As of now, people have tendency of sending their children to schools for ensuring their better future.

The emergence of educated social group among the Nyishis has been playing a very significant role not only in bringing about a series of changes in the society but also is responsible for creating an awareness to shed away their isolationist outlook and develop the feelings of brotherhood and a sense of solidarity leading thereby to the process of forging of Nyishi identity in the society. The Nyishis were known by different names like Bangni, Bangru, Yano, Aya, Akang, Lali, Tagin Dafla, Hill Miri, etc. and they are practically scattered in a large geographical regions. Because of the topographical hurdles, they could hardly meet and interact with one another. The cultural policy pursued by the NEFA administration in fifties was to develop the tribes along the lines of their traditions. Therefore, administration adopted protectionist policy and thus created conditions for promoting and developing the tribal cultural practices. Celebration of community festivals collectively provided a common platform to the Nyishis where they could meet each other that creates a sense of brotherhood and also led to forge a common Nyishi identity. In this process of the formation of Nyishi identity, 'Bharat Darshan Tours' and 'film media' also played a significant role. But it was the intellectuals who inculcated the consciousness of common identity through various forums like: 'All Nyishi Youth Association', 'All Nyishi Students' Union' and 'Nyishi Elite Society'.

II

The coming of modernity among the Arunachalee tribes has not only brought socio-economic and political development but it has also created a space for religious transformation in the society. The history of Christian movement in Arunachal Pradesh and for that matter among the Nyishis can only be understood as an integral part of a larger process of change. When we trace the history of Christianity among Nyishis, we came to know that in the beginning conversion was negligible. But the Nyishi missionary students took the lead of planting churches in the Nyishi belt consequent upon which there was spurt of conversion particularly after the incidents of frequent persecution in the early 1970's. The government attempted to check the conversion through legislation popularly known as *Arunachal Pradesh Indigenous Faith Act 1978*, but inspite of this the spread of Christianity in the Nyishi inhabited areas continued unabatedly. The dominating factor for the spread of Christianity among the Nyishis is undoubtedly, the perennial nature of rituals and sacrifices that are involved in the tribal religion. The prime concern about spirituality of the religion was not there. The early converts were basically those who could not be able to sustain the expenditure incurred for arranging traditional rituals and sacrifices. Despite belief in the existence of a transcendent, benevolent, creator god, the actual religious practice of the Nyishis had been based upon fear of malevolent spirits. One cannot skip appeasing or propitiating the spirits because the moment they do so the wrath of offended spirits will haunt the doer. This has rendered them a feeling of insecurity spiritually as well as materially.

Educational work of the Christian missions has also played a role in spreading the Christianity. The Nyishis who studied in the mission schools started questioning the validity of various rituals and sacrifices involved in the traditional belief system. They found in new religion an alternative making the costly rituals and sacrifices redundant. The Nyishi students studying in the Christian mission schools, when came back to their villages started preaching Christianity and openly denounced the traditional priest-centred ritualistic system. Thus, in the five decades of history among the Nyishis, the Christianity is now on firm footing. There is hardly any Nyishi village, where the Christianity does not have influence.

An internal psychological tension is emerging between the Christian community and non-Christians. The latter allege that the Christians are eroding the cultural and religious fabric of the society. The Christian converts desist themselves from associating or joining social functions including the festivals. The practices which are contrary to their religion are termed as *Satanic* and sinful, and hence they openly denounce and disassociate themselves from such practices. Another charge being leveled against Christianity is that the converts tend to lose the basic morality. It is also alleged that Christians are abandoning popular folk songs and dances merely on the ground that these are all superstitious in nature. The non-converts feel that the conversion is causing tension within the family, villagers and the community. Christian converts, on the other hand argue that the religious elements in the old life did not in any way alienate or result in the loss of people's identity, because the traditional religious element had not contributed to that in the first place. In fact, it was in the new forms of religious life that the tribal identity was strengthened. They refute the view that morality has been degraded rather on the other hand Christianity has wiped out numerous immoral practices from the society. They opine that the Christianity has opened up the people's conscience and put a new vision to the tradition-bound society.

III

The study amply reveals that within the Christian converts two groups have emerged, one liberal and the other conservative. The proponents of liberal view favour the integration of many of the traditional socio-cultural practices with the new faith. This group tends to be inclusive in dealing with other religious communities including the Indigenous religion. It may be mentioned here that in comparison to other denominations, the Catholic Christians seem to be bit liberal and accommodative in nature as far as their dealing with the socio-religious aspect of the tribal is concerned. The conservative group insists strict adherence to the religious ideology and to some extent they believe in the notion of superiority of their religion. Generally, the educated Christians subscribe to the liberal view points while the less educated and illiterate ones are more incline to the conservative group. It is the educated or elite group who plays a role of bridging the gap between the Christians and the non-Christians. They actively participate in the community festivals and even some of them offer leadership in the celebration committee.

For all practical purposes, the overwhelming conversion of Nyishis into the Christianity has over shadowed the traditional faith and belief, which is based on elaborate rituals and sacrifices. The traditional priests who are the backbone of the indigenous faith and belief system have now started converting to Christianity. For almost last two decades, confusion arises on the pressing question about indigenous religion. The converts argued that the traditional faith and belief is nothing but full of superstitions. Many of the younger generations also subscribe to this notion. Under the shadow of this notion some traditional customs, usages, faiths and practices have been either abandoned or rarely practised. There is of course perceptible change in regard to social evils such as child & forced marriage, polygamy, slavery etc. but the people are at loss to think in terms of reforming and reviving the age-old religious tradition which are as good as the other so-called advanced religion. It is worth mentioning that there was a long drawn debate since early 1970's among the Adi intellectuals especially from Minyong, Padam and Pasi sub groups over the issue of Donyi-Polo as their religion. In the beginning, there was no unanimity regarding the nomenclature. But gradually, the people started accepting the term Donyi-Polo to refer to their religion. The Donyi-Polo faith came to limelight in 1980, when it was formally registered as one of the indigenous religions in the World Religious Freedom Organization. Subsequently, the Donyi-Polo movement among the Adis under the leadership of late Talom Rukbo gained momentum and it has now sizeable followers. They are putting all-out efforts to make Donyi-Polo an organized and institutionalized religion.

It is obvious that the rapidly spreading proselytisation to Christianity among the Nyishis has alarmed the people those who believe and are still practising the traditional religion. In these circumstances, a few organizations based on indigenous culture and belief system were formed in the later part of 1990's. The Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Culture Society (NIFCS) is one of such organizations that pledge to preserve, promote and propagate the indigenous religion and culture. Under this broad spectrum, a specific body to carry forward exclusively the religious aspect known as '*Nyedar Namlo*' has been evolved. Efforts are being made to institutionalize the indigenous religion through *Nyedar Namlo*; as such a number of branches are opened in different parts of Nyishi belt. As far as the mode and method of indigenous religious movement is concerned, there are some reservations even among the indigenous groups. The nomenclature - Donyi-Polo is also being questioned. In fact, the Nyishis attached unqualified importance to *Donyi*[1], while *Polo*[2] has got no such significance. There is some mythological evidence to this notion.

Their association with the Hindu based organizations has become a point of discussion among the people. It has perturbed many people who support the cause of indigenous religion. On the top of this, there are again two groups within the believers of indigenous religion. One group is staunchly against the Christian religion while the other group consists of liberal viewpoints and believes in inclusive religious ideology. The former seeks complete disassociation or even prohibition of the Christians from attending socio-religious functions including the festivals on the ground that their presence vitiates the very purpose of the festival or ritual. The other group argues that one's religion should not disqualify him from freely joining or participating in the festivals as it represents the broader aspect of indigenous culture. It is therefore, the inherent ideological divisions within the Christian converts as well as within the indigenous religious believers that sustain a kind of restraining force from friction or conflict between the two religious ideologies. The liberal views evolved within the two religious communities have been putting the respective opposite viewpoints in a balance.

Despite the virtual polarization of people into two religious groups, it has not yet reflected in the electoral politics. In other words, religion has never been an issue during the elections as these are being contested on the line of party politics and the individual capabilities in terms of merit or ability and of course the wealth or money still matters a lot. Both the groups as a whole irrespective of their different religious ideology have strong sense and pride of common identity, as 'Nyishi' and they cannot digest any kind of dishouner or disgrace to 'Nyishi Identity'. To a great extent, the *Nyishi Elite Society* (NES) is playing a vital role in accommodating different view points and put together for shaping the common interest of the community. The coming of Christianity has opened the window through which we can see and realize both the rich variety of faiths within the Indigenous religion itself and the vitality of other religious faiths.

IV

There is deep concern about the growing hostility and intellectual conflict evidenced with the assertions made in the public place and even in the print or electronic media by both the Christians and non-Christians. This is not only the problem of the Nyishi community but also of all those communities of the state, in which quite a good number of members have been influenced by the outside religions and culture. The root of whole problem is wrong notion, attitude and way of thinking. People should accept the reality that the change is the law of nature and one cannot avoid the changing cycle of life. Recall the primitive days, which were so different in comparison to the present days. How drastically everything has changed, and these changes have brought peace, progress and prosperity in human life. But this does not mean that alien dress, manner, culture and tradition should be imitated. Of late, it is found that some people are getting crazy after 'western way of life and culture'. Even those who adhered to Christianity or any other religion for that matter must at the same time also have sincere reverence for the age-old rich cultural heritage, tradition and dresses.

Whether one follows this religion or that religion, it makes no difference. But what is important is that the people must remain united and put wholehearted effort to preserve and promote at least those elements of indigenous culture which are essence of common identity and do not have any harmful or adverse effects. For instance, the traditional dresses, the way of life, food habits, festival, language, folklore etc. must be preserved, promoted and propagated. Let's introspect ourselves and find out why is it so that we assimilate the elements of alien religions and cultures so easily in our life? While there is hardly any example to prove that the members of other religious groups ever accommodated even the brightest aspects of our culture into their life. Now the natural question arises if others can't translate our rich cultural heritage and belief system why should we be so crazy to borrow others' customs, traditions and belief systems. Is it not gross injustice to our age-old unique culture and belief system?

Indeed, many people irrespective of religion are trying painstakingly to promote a sense of brotherhood and unity in the society, yet it is unfortunate that a few members due to their rigidity, negative attitude and superiority complex are knowingly or unknowingly obstructing the ideal process. The conservatism and narrowness on the question of religion have to be effectively shunned as it may lead to chaos and confusion in the society. Sensitization of true spirituality among the people especially the growing up youths is the need of the hour because there is tendency of running after the money, that too with all fraud and unfair means.

It must be realized that unless both the Christians and the followers of Indigenous Faith go hand in hand without misunderstanding and tendency of blaming each other, the society cannot strive and remain united. It is the responsibility of all likeminded people including the intellectuals, NGOs, religious leaders, social activists and the policy makers to put utmost efforts in order to inculcate the quality of religious tolerance among the different sections of the society. The future of the Nyishi squarely lies on inclusive religious ideology, realization of secularism and promotion of the vitality of religious pluralism. As a student of history, it is very difficult to predict, what shape the Nyishi society and for that matter the Arunachalee societies would take, faced with the emerging religious identities. Identity is not something fixed forever but is a product of history. It is a process and goes on evolving. It is a construct and is negotiable. Therefore, there cannot be any definite answer to the questions: whether the society will be vertically divided on the line of religion? whether there will be perpetual dissension or feud in the society? would the different religious groups co-exist harmoniously and create space for pluralistic and secular society? That is why the title of this chapter is, 'concluding remarks without conclusions'.

NOTES & REFERENCES

1. Nyishis describe it by prefixing as '*Ann Donyi*' or '*Ayi Donyi*' to make it more meaningful.
2. Merely use it as suffix to match the compound word *Donyi-Polo*.

APPENDICES

Since there are little archival sources for my work, I have devoted to fieldwork extensively by conducting interviews orally. As such, I hardly used conventional method of data collection through structured schedule. Apart from normal interaction and interview with large number of people from different background, I had engaged the elderly village folks for a long conversation. Of course these conversations were guided by a set of questions that I had previously framed. Besides, during these interviews, I made use of tape recorder for recording the conversation and took photographs of important objects and places. For understanding of some specific aspects or phenomena, I have used few-framed schedule and on that basis a computation of data has also been made.

Appendix – A

Questionnaire-cum-interview schedule

(Strictly confidential to be used for Research purpose only)

Part – A (Respondent's bio-data):

Name (in block letter) :
Address :
Sex : Male/Female
Religion :
Tribe :
Age in years only :
Marital status : Married/unmarried
Educational Qualification :
Occupation/Profession :

Part - B (Questionnaires, to be answered in one/two sentences only):

1. In your opinion, what could be an appropriate term for the Indigenous religion of Nyishis?

2. Explain the core meaning of Donyi-Polo.
3. Why is sacrifice compulsory in the Indigenous religion?
4. Can we have Indigenous religion without sacrifice?
5. Point out the basic role of Priest in traditional society.
6. Does the role of Priest need to be changed in the contemporary society?
7. Can the Priesthood be institutionalized in order to impart formal teaching for attaining priesthood?
8. Do you believe in adopting the traditional religious practices in toto so as to maintain originality?
9. Point out some illogical or useless religious practices of the Indigenous religion.
10. What are the immediate causes of indigenous religious movement among the people?
11. Is Donyi-Polo religion akin to Hindu religion and if so how?
12. Do you agree that Hindus are trying to assimilate the Indigenous religion into their fold?
13. In your opinion, what are the differences between the Hindu and the Christian vis-à-vis Indigenous religion is concerned?
14. Enumerate the important factors, which were responsible for the rapid growth of Christianity among the Nyishis.
15. Do you think that the persecutions of Christian converts are justified?
16. Do the Christians use unfair means to convert the people?
17. Should the 'Indigenous Faith Act 1978' be implemented in the state and why?
18. What are the merits and demerits of this Act?
19. Mention the positive impact of Christianization in the society.
20. Similarly, point out the negative impact of it.
21. Has Christianity helped in effecting social change in the society?
22. Is there a polarization in Nyishi society on the line of religion?
23. What could be the future of society giving the fact that it is being identified as two separate religious identities?
24. Do you have apprehension of social tension in the light of religious realities?
25. What are the remedies if such problem crops up?

26. What should be the role of the government in regard to the religious aspect of the people?

Date: Signature of the respondent

Place:

Appendix – B

Attitudinal Test

(Strictly confidential to be used for Research purpose only)

Part – A (Respondent's bio-data):

Name (in block letter)	:	
Address	:	
Sex	:	Male/Female
Religion	:	
Tribe	:	
Age in years only	:	
Marital status	:	Married/unmarried
Educational Qualification	:	
Occupation	:	

Part – B (Please tick mark the chosen option):

1. There is unanimity in calling Nyishi religion as Donyi-Polo:
   (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree
   (e) Undecided
2. Among the Nyishis, ' Donyi' is only an equivalent term to refer the God:
   (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree
   (e) Undecided
3. Nyishi (indigenous) religion is as good as the other religions:
   (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree
   (e) Undecided
4. Sacrificial part is the main drawback of the tribal religion as it involves huge expenditure:
   (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree
   (e) Undecided

5. The indigenous religion could be modified so as to counter the challenges of other advanced religions:

   (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided

6. The role of Priest is still relevant even in this modern age:

   (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided

7. Material means is the main cause of conversion to Christianity:

   (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided

8. Illiteracy and ignorance are the main factor of conversion to alien religions:

   (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided

9. Spirituality is more appealing in Christian religion:

   (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided

10. Spirituality in Indigenous religion is equally appealing:

    (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided

11. There is hardly any distinction between social and religious aspects in the Nyishi society:

    (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided

12. The Nyedar Namlo Movement will usher decisive religious transformation among the Nyishis:

    (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided

13. Christianity has contributed for social change in Nyishi community:

    (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided

14. Christianity has eroded the socio-religious fabric of the community:

    (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided

15. Indigenization of Christianity will be acceptable to all:
    (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided
16. There are clear and visible Hindu influences in Indigenous religion:
    (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided
17. The influences of other religion will certainly vitiate the originality of the Indigenous religion:
    (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided
18. The polarizations of religion into two vertical dominant group will lead to the division of society:
    (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided
19. The division of community on religious line will become social tension in the society:
    (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided
20. The religious tolerance based on pluralistic society will be the interest of all:
    (a) Agree (b) Strongly Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree (e) Undecided

Date:

Signature of respondent

Place:

Appendix – C

Schedule for Data relating to Occupational/Professional background

Sl. No	*Name*	*Qualification*	*Designation*	*Service category*	*Year of absorption*	*Dept*

Appendix – D

Schedule for survey of Religious Places

Name of Religion	*Name of Religious Place*	*Year of Establishment*	*Management*	*Funding*	*Members*
	1. 2.				

Appendix – E

Schedule for determining Growth of Christianity

Name of Village (Sample village):
Circle and District :
State :

Sl. No.	*Name of convert*	*Age*	*Sex*	*Year of Conversion*	*Denomination*

Appendix – F

Aim and Objective of Nyishis Affirmation Day at Ligu on 19.12.1998

Today is 19th the 19th of December. By numerology nineteen is the most unique number and traditionally December is the month of hectic activities and prosperity. We could not be more convinced of that truth!

Today, we have, from all walks of life, congregated with singular conviction and utmost satisfactions never ever experienced before!

This pride and pleasure has, in fact, been due for long. But the path to-day's historic Affirmation of our authentic identity has been tricky and trying.

Be it an Assamese Buranjee writer or English Historian, everyone suffered from misplaced perception of us. We have been, as such, reflected in their works that is so inimical to our growth and development as a homogenous society. And as a matter of fact and unfortunately there were nobody to challenge or censor such erroneous documentations. Efforts, however, were begun by our earliest learners. But meaningful steps eluded us year after year for decades together.

In the meanwhile, such irrelevant and derogatory term as "Dafla" was found to represent us in the constitution of the country. Therefore, need for more concerted efforts to set the records straight arose, more positively in the recent past which is an indication of intellectual maturity in our society. The desires and sentiments have reached its peak and shaped into a mammoth social movement.

This movement is for TRUTH. This movement is for HARMONY. This movement is for PEACE.

Now, therefore, having been traumatically miss-classified and mistaken for centuries, having considered all aspects of our social and traditional evolutions and having verified with special reference to our age-old folklores, we have come to the conclusion that as much as Earth as the mother of all creatures is true, as much as Abo Tani as the father of all mankind is true it is equally true that we are NYISHI. From times immemorial we have been calling ourselves NYISHI. This, we AFFIRM to-day. And to-day, we AFFIRM also of our pledge to ADOPT and retain our socially and traditionally AUTHENTIC TRIBE NOMENCLATURE, "NYISHI", for all times to come. All imperfections of the past which are narrow and divisive are abolished forthwith.

AFFIRMED THIS DAY OF 19TH DECEMBER 1998.

Sd/-

(Er. Don Tater)
Chairman
For and on behalf of
PEOPLE AND ORGANISING COMMITTEE
NYISHI AFFIRMATION DAY: DAPORIJO.

Appendix – G

JOINT DECLARATION

A historic peace summit of the Nyishis and the Bodos of Arunachal and Assam respectively was held on 11/04/2002 at the Banquet Hall, Itanagar. After having threadbare deliberations the leaders from both the community resolved to agree upon the following points:

1. The joint Summit agreed and called for restoration of peace and harmony by stopping all types of atrocities like kidnapping, torture, extortion etc. meted out to the Nyishis living along the borders. The Summit also resolved to work unitedly in a reciprocal manner to prevent the re-occurrence of such incidents in future.
2. The Summit agreed to constitute a broad based PEACE COMMITTEE consisting of members from both the communities to maintain social harmony and peaceful co-existence so as to contain the recurrence of any such untoward incidents in future.
3. The Summit resolved to make joint visits to all affected areas and hold public meetings/rallies to be attended by leaders of both the communities so as to do away with any misunderstanding between the two communities. Such initiatives shall be taken up by the Peace Committee.
4. The Summit resolved to appeal the people of both communities to maintain peace, harmony and brother.
5. The Summit also in the strongest terms condemns the persons/ organization responsible for committing social crimes in the border areas.

Hence, as a goodwill gesture the social boycott called by the NYISHI ELITE SOCIETY (NES) and the ALL NYISHI STUDENTS UNION (ANSU) stand withdrawn.

Sd/-	Sd/-
Dr. Ligu Tacho	Brojendra Brahma
President	President
Nyishi Elite Society (NES)	Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS)
Sd/-	Sd/-
Hayeng Mangfi	Rabiram Narzary
President	President
All Nyishi Students' Union	All Bodo Stuents' Union

Dated, Itanagar the 11th April 2002.

GLOSSARY OF NYISHI WORDS

Abo Tani	:	Ancestor of human race.
Achi	:	Elder brother.
Aching	:	Cooked rice.
Ading	:	Meat.
Am	:	Paddy.
Ambing	:	Rice
Anyia Hari	:	Last son of Atu Nyia.
Alu	:	Day
Arh donam	:	Prohibition or rest day for the community observed after rituals or death of a person.
Atu Nyia	:	Forefather of the Nyishi.
Ayu	:	Night
Bamong	:	Sun in Adi language
Bela Barnam	:	Creation.
Bogu	:	Narrow passage through which the people had crossed.
Boo	:	Assistant or helper who repeats the words of priest.
Bungriang Bungte	:	Settlement of contentious issues through mediation.
Bur	:	Crocodile.
Changte – Dote	:	The universe or world.
Chene Rolom	:	Spirit or device used for the creation of universe.
Cheyato	:	Bite it.

Dapo-Dingnam	:	Settlement of dispute with certain rituals.
Dingdung dingnam	:	Swear or promise.
Dojang Weyi	:	Spirits of sky.
Dokum	:	Gathering.
Donyi – Polo	:	Indigenous religion of the Tani group of tribes.
Dubu Weyi	:	Malevolent spirit.
Dukam	:	Wooden coffin to feed the pig.
Eme	:	Fire
Esi	:	Water or water body.
Gingdung	:	Intermediary.
Idh bingnam	:	Traditional folk song.
Jangte Ne/Ane	:	The mother sun.
Jeri nanam	:	Healing
Jingang	:	Poor and wretched man.
Komchi-Lella	:	First ray of the sun.
Korium Kolu	:	Original place or beginning.
Mape-Alu	:	Sugar from North.
Mayap	:	Wing of eagle.
Mazi	:	Tongueless Bell.
Mekh	:	Local dried smoke leaf.
Namchang	:	Settlement.
Ngumngo bo	:	A spirit or deity who put the earth in present form.
Nyeda Angnam	:	Process of Marriage.
Nyedar Namlo	:	Indigenous religious place.
Nyedo	:	The heaven or rain.
Nyeme	:	Northern neighbours.
Nyele Meram	:	Traditional political Institution.
Nyepa	:	Southern neighbours.
Nyete	:	Wealthy man.
Nyi	:	Human being.

Nyia Tani	:	Forefather of real human being.
Nyoku	:	Earth (landmass).
Nyoku Weyi	:	Spirits of land.
Nyokum	:	Name of festival.
Opo	:	Wine or alcohol.
Oriok	:	Sword.
Pabung	:	River.
Pahi hinam	:	A purifying or cleansing rituals.
Parte-Ringte	:	Goddess of prosperity.
Pate	:	Tiger.
Piriya pinam	:	A hypnotizing rituals.
Polu/Polo	:	The moon.
Poter-Mite Weyi	:	A protective deity (Benevolent deity).
Reyi Angnam	:	Mutual reciprocity for labour mobilization.
Robu Pacha	:	Younger brother of Abo Tani.
Rongo	:	Agricultural field.
Rukpi Sonam	:	War dance.
Saa-Pabung	:	Huge and mighty river.
Sachang`	:	The earth.
Sangrekh	:	Huge tree – an abode of devils (Peepal tree).
Sebe	:	Mithun - a symbol of wealth.
Sedi	:	Beginning or beginner (in Adi)
Sobu Weyi	:	The benevolent deity.
Sotung tungnam	:	A ritual to kill a person.
Sudung einam	:	Ordeal - by putting hand in boiling water.
Tabe	:	Snake.
Talu	:	Brace plate.
Takhi	:	Ginger.
Tani	:	Forefather of human race.

Teim	:	Millet
Tasang	:	Bead.
Topu	:	Maize.
Tudi-Yami	:	Young boys and girls.
Tumph Rongo	:	Jhum cultivation.
Weyi	:	Spirits - both benevolent and malevolent.
Weyi Nyoku	:	Nether world.
Weyi Panam	:	Performance of rituals and sacrifices.
Yajyalu	:	Soul
Yapum Weyi	:	Evil spirits of forest.
Yugang	:	Altar
Yuma	:	Dream
Yullow Weyi	:	Highest order of the rituals and festivals.

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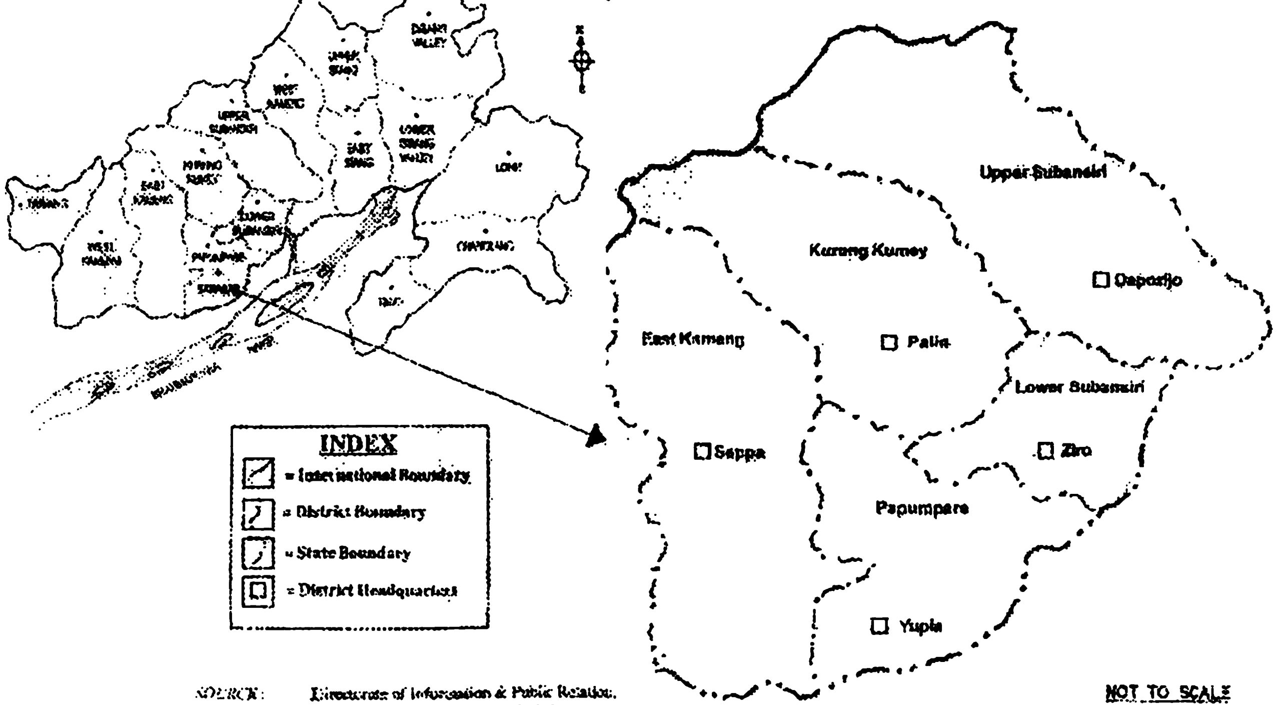
MAPS

ARUNACHAL PRADESH : SHOWING DISTRICTS OF STUDY AREA
(Nyishi Inhabited Districts)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TAWANG
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EAST KAMENG
KURUNG KUMEY
UPPER SUBANSIRI
LOWER SUBANSIRI
PAPUMPARE
WEST SIANG
UPPER SIANG
EAST SIANG
DIBANG VALLEY
LOWER DIBANG VALLEY
LOHIT
CHANGLANG
TIRAP
BRAHMAPUTRA
INDEX
= International Boundary
= District Boundary
= State Boundary
= District Headquarters
Upper Subansiri
Daporijo
Kurung Kumey
Palin
East Kameng
Seppa
Lower Subansiri
Ziro
Papumpare
Yupia
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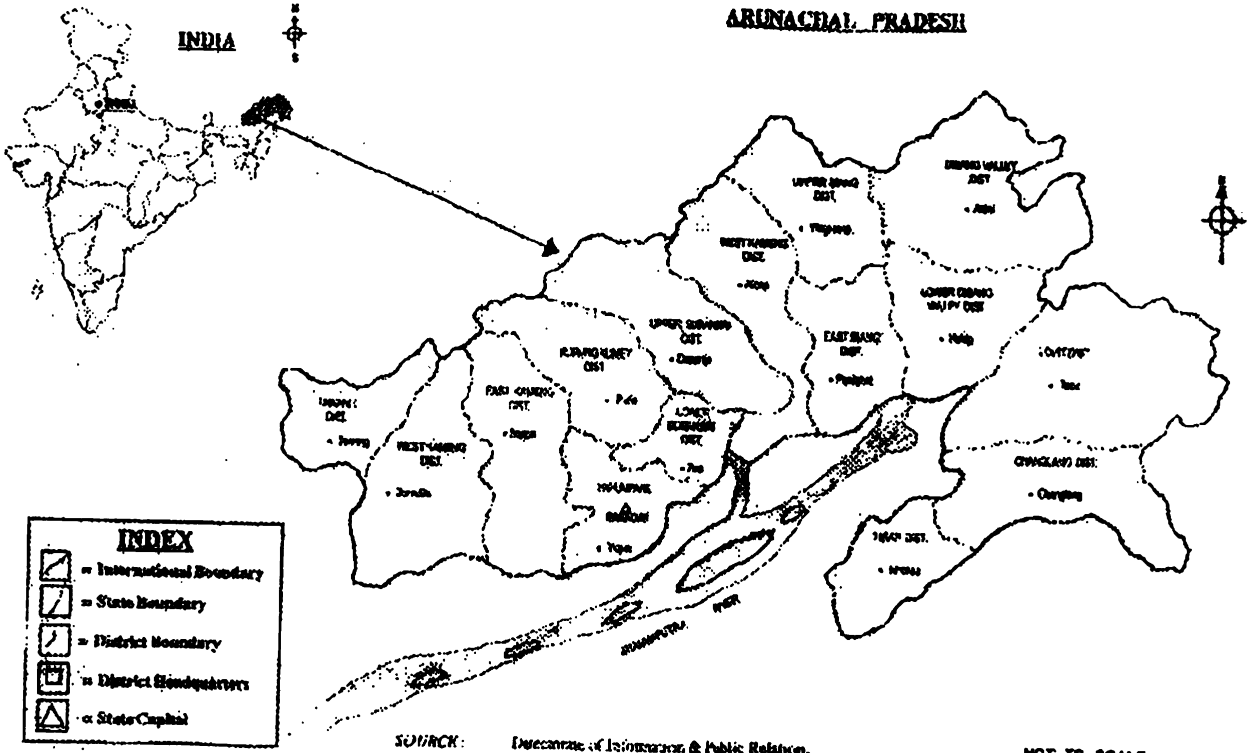
INDIA
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
TAWANG DIST.
• Tawang
WEST KAMENG DIST.
• Bomdila
EAST KAMENG DIST.
• Seppa
UPPER SUBANSIRI DIST.
• Daporijo
LOWER SUBANSIRI DIST.
PAPUMPARE
ITANAGAR
• Yupia
WEST KAMENG DIST.
• Along
UPPER SIANG DIST.
• Yingkiong
EAST SIANG DIST.
• Pasighat
DIBANG VALLEY DIST
• Anini
LOWER DIBANG VALLEY DIST
• Roing
LOHIT
• Tezu
CHANGLANG DIST.
• Changlang
TIRAP DIST.
• Khonsa
BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER
INDEX
= International Boundary
= State Boundary
= District Boundary
= District Headquarters
= State Capital

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NOT TO SCALE

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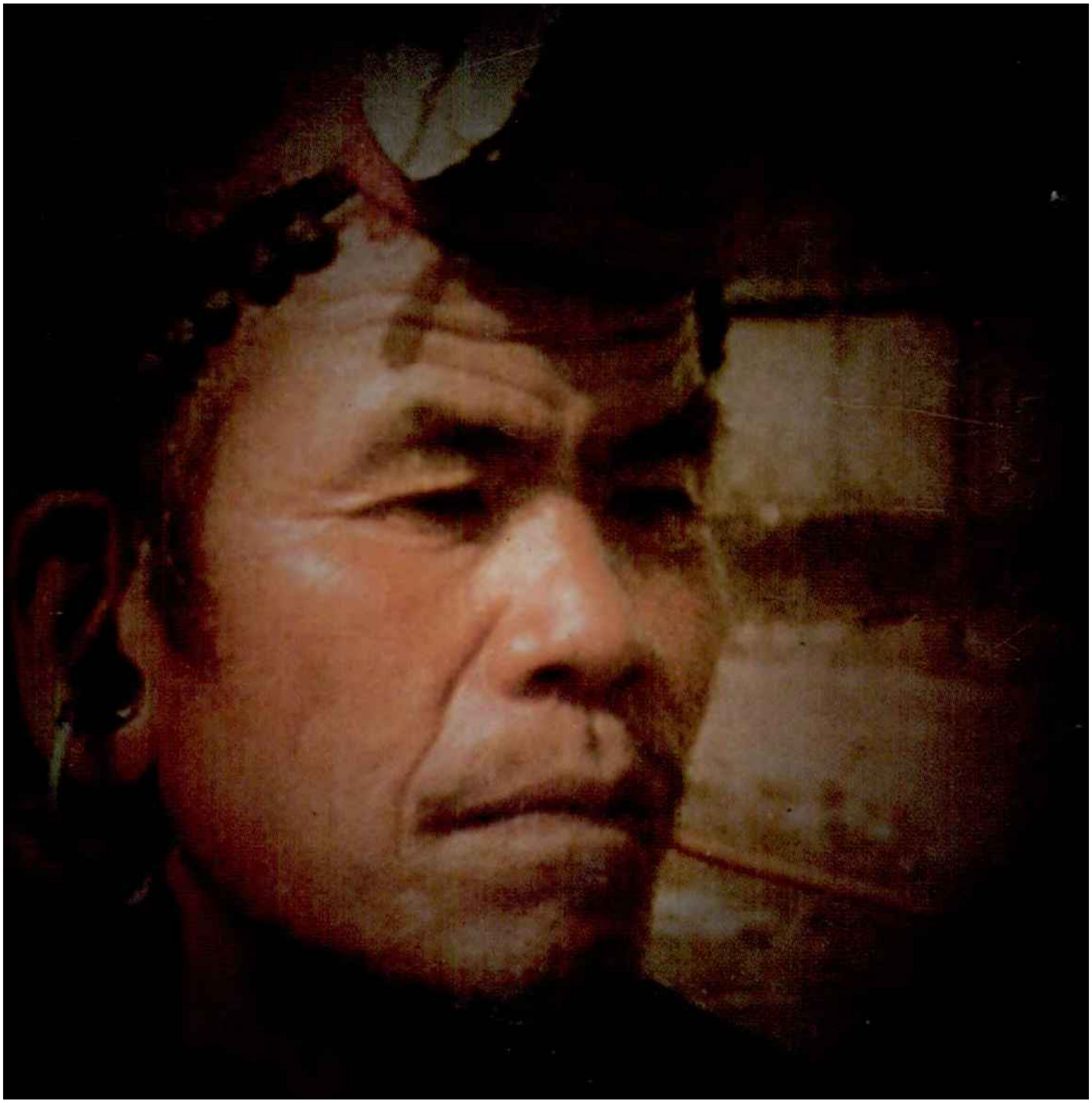
ISBN 81-8324-032-1



Mittal Publications
PUBLISHERS OF SCHOLARLY BOOKS
A-110, Mohan Garden
NEW DELHI - 110 059 (INDIA)
Tel.: 25351493, 25351976,Telefax : 91-11-25351521,
E-Mail : Mittalp@ndf.vsnl.net.in, Website : www.mittalpublications.com
SHOWROOM : 4594/9, Daryaganj, NEW DELHI- 110002 Tel.: 23250398

ISBN 81-8324-032-1
9 788183 240321